Learning with One Another in the Spirit: A Decolonial and Synodal Religious Education

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Grassroots church communities demonstrate what it means to resist colonial ways of learning and of being church that have been internalized and reproduced in educational and ecclesial spaces. In their practices of communal discernment, they bear witness to a kind of religious education wherein all learn with one another.

Learning from the practices of these communities, this dissertation is an exercise of reimagining a religious education that resists colonial ways of being and creates the possibility for all to learn with one another in the Spirit. Informed by a theology of synodality and the principles of critical pedagogy, I argue for a religious education that is a practice of creating space for an engagement with local theologies that are grounded in the everyday, for dialogue to emerge wherein all learn through diffraction, and for the voice of the Spirit to arise from a kind of dialogue that is not merely an exchange of ideas but a meeting and being with one another.

Synodality, as seen in the synodal practices of basic ecclesial communities, creates space for a church that learns together. Synodal practices show how people can do theology together in a dialogical way, discerning how the Spirit is guiding the church in the context of the everyday. Critical pedagogy, on the other hand, centers silenced voices in the practices of learning and teaching. In doing so, critical pedagogy fosters a critical awareness of hegemonic epistemologies while creating space for capacitating silenced voices in dialogue. These two foundations inform the religious education I am arguing for in this dissertation.

I propose that this religious education is seen most concretely in participatory action research (PAR) which creates spaces for people to learn with one another for transformation. PAR expands the pedagogical imagination as it involves the people as active agents of the process of knowledge production, decolonizing the research process and presents a way of learning with one another in a way that is just. Using PAR as a way to do a synodal and decolonial religious education, grassroots church communities can listen to the Spirit together, guiding the church into new ways of knowing and being.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious education in grassroots church communities resists the colonial domination of the religious imagination. In the backdrop of colonialism that persists in various forms until today, these communities offer a decolonial witness and create spaces for learning with each other and with the Spirit who guides the church. This dissertation learns from these communities about what it means to learn with one another.

I. Religious Education in the Context of De/Coloniality

A. Five Hundred Years of Coloniality and Resistance

In 2021, the Philippines marked five hundred years of Christian presence in the country. Different celebrations and commemorations were held – while some call for celebration for the rich Christian heritage passed down since 1521, others call for a more critical reflection and even demand that the institutional church apologize to indigenous people for their role in the atrocities of Spanish colonization.[1] The mixed reaction to such a milestone shows the complexities of the relationship between colonization and religion.

[1] Cf. Jose Mario Francisco's introductory chapter in *Between Celebration and Critique: Snapshots from 500 Years of Philippine Christianity* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2021) for a discussion about the commemorations and the theological and social underpinnings of the landmark event.

Ever since the first mass and baptisms in 1521, Christianity in the Philippines has shared a long and complicated history with coloniality and empire. On the one hand, missionary activity and education was used to justify colonial rule as most conquistadores "regarded the spread of Catholicism as an effective agent of implementing Spanish colonial control over the natives."[2] In converting natives to Christianity, the Spaniards (as they had done in Latin America) "baptized allegedly free barbarians and sovereigns to make them submissive Christians, dominated by the colonials of a Christian empire."[3] In addition to a subjugation of peoples through missionary activity, "indigenous spirituality was demonized and its women spiritual healers and priestesses were demoted and denigrated."[4] The co-optation of Christianity, removed from its original liberating beginnings as a resistance against empire, has become the religion of empire itself – subjugating and erasing local ways of knowing and being in favor of a Hispanic, Euro-centric order.

On the other hand, Christianity has also resisted empire, colonization, and colonial ways of being that these have left in their wake. The first synod in Manila in 1582 was convened by the bishop Domingo De Salazar to address the issue of forced labor, the stealing of land, among other issues of abuse done by the Spaniards to the indigenous people at the time of colonization. De Salazar wrote to the king about the abuses in the relatively new colony, criticizing "the Spanish conquistadores who used the *encomienda* system solely to get rich quickly…while failing in their duty to preach the gospel."[5] In another instance where the Christian faith was used

[2] John Leddy Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 23.
[3] Enrique Dussel, "Epistemological Decolonization of Theology" in *Wrestling with God in Context,* M.P. Joseph, et al., eds., (Minneapolis; 1517 Media, 2018), 54.
[4] Agnes Brazal, Cristina Lledo Gomez, and Ma. Marilou Ibita, "Philippine Christianity: 500 Years of Resistance and Accommodation," in *500 Years of Christianity and the Global Filipino/a: Postcolonial Perspectives* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2024), 13.
[5] Brazal, Gomez, and Ibita, 4.

to resist empire, the native communities used the symbols, images, and narratives of the Christian faith in a reinterpretation of the Gospel in contrast to an interpretation made by empire. The religious practices of a colonized people, like the chanting of the *pasyon* which is discussed in the next chapter, show a faith that resists the evils of empire and reimagine how the Gospel could be enfleshed and set them free in the context of empire.

The complicated relationship between religion and empire in the Philippines has been described as both a resistance and an accommodation.[6] The Christianity co-opted by colonizers as a tool for violence and subjugation is resisted and reinterpreted back to its source as a faith that liberates the poor and oppressed. The Spaniards colonized the Philippines for 333 years, to be followed by 48 years as a colony of the United States. The Philippines can now be described as a post-colony, achieving independence from these big empires and determining itself as a people in this modern world.

However, even after the colonizers have long gone, colonial ways of being and knowing remain – internalized in the culture and structures that govern people's lives. Ecclesial spaces remain colonial when they rigidly divide between a teaching and a learning church, a church that evangelizes and a church that merely receives the evangelization of the clergy. Educational spaces remain colonial when they use what the critical pedagogue Paulo Freire calls the banking model of education wherein minds of students are seen as mere receptacles of data, ignoring the learner's agency.[7] Research remains a colonial practice when minoritized communities are

[6] The introductory essay to the book *500 Years of Christianity and the Global Filipino/a* discusses themes of resistance and accommodation as it highlights important milestones in Philippine history in its interface with religion and colonialism. Cf. Agnes Brazal, Cristina Lledo Gomez, and Ma. Marilou Ibita, "Philippine Christianity: 500 Years of Resistance and Accommodation," in *500 Years of Christianity and the Global Filipino/a: Postcolonial Perspectives* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2024), 1-26.
[7] Cf. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 72.

objectified and their voices are not heard. A colonial culture, deeply ingrained in the people's ways of knowing, supports and even perpetuates these structures.

B. Decoloniality and Religious Education

The decolonial theorist Anibal Quijano refers to this as coloniality which he argues, "is still the most general form of domination in the world today."[8] In his landmark essay "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," Quijano explains how colonial domination persists in spite of the fact that formal political colonialism has ended. In the first place, colonialism is both a repression of and an expropriation from the knowledge of the colonized, as Quijano narrates:

> In the beginning colonialism was a product of a systematic repression, not only of the specific beliefs, ideas, images, symbols or knowledge that were not useful to global colonial domination, while at the same time the colonizers were expropriating from the colonized their knowledge, specially [sic.] in mining, agriculture, engineering, as well as their products and work.[9]

What follows is "the imposition of the use of the rulers' own patterns of expression, and of their beliefs and images with reference to the supernatural."[10] The repression of the local knowledges of the colonized is replaced by the knowledges and beliefs of the colonizers, deemed as universal. This impeded the knowledge production of the colonized and, as seen in the case of the conquistadores in the Philippines, "a very efficient means of social and cultural control."[11]

Coloniality persists today in circuits of power and in the production of knowledge. As Quijano argues, coloniality is "a colonization of the imagination of the dominated; that is, it acts in the interior of that imagination, in a sense, it is a part of it."[12] The colonial domination of

[8] Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21/2-3 (2007): 170.
[9] Quijano, 169.
[10] Quijano, 169.
[11] Quijano, 169.
[12] Quijano, 169.

European and "Western" knowledge, i.e. the framework of modernity/rationality, is seen when it is deemed as the "universal paradigm of knowledge and of the relation between humanity and the rest of the world."[13] What underlies coloniality is the assumption of "a single world with a single truth,"[14] in which "the West has managed to universalize its own idea of the world, which only modern science can know and thoroughly study."[15] This single truth is backed by assumptions of racial and cultural superiority fostered and interiorized in the colonial relationship over the past centuries – the superiority of the dominant and the inferiority of those dominated are carried out today in the imaginations and the ways of knowledge production around the world.[16]

Here enters the call to decolonize – "to liberate the production of knowledge, reflection, and communication from the pitfalls of European rationality/modernity."[17] Decoloniality is a resistance against the universal paradigm of knowledge and creating space for what the Zapatistas and the decolonial theorist Arturo Escobar calls the pluriverse, "a world in which many worlds might fit."[18] This is an engagement with the different local knowledges that have been suppressed, ignored, or seen as inferior in the coloniality of knowledge and power. The pluriverse is a "shared project"[19] based on multiple (cosmo)visions of reality that do not deny but depend on "the historical diversity and heterogeneity of society, of every society,"[20] a space for the diverse ways of knowing and being.

[13] Quijano, 172.
[14] Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 15.
[15] Escobar, 26.
[16] Quijano, 171.
[17] Quijano, 177.
[18] Escobar, 26.
[19] Escobar, 26.
[20] Quijano, 177.

It may be helpful at this point to clarify, as Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh do, that the decolonial perspective "does not mean a rejection or negation of Western thought; in fact, Western thought is part of the pluriversal."[21] There is a complexity to Western thought and Western civilization, having critiques against its claims of universality and superiority, like the example above with Domingo De Salazar and with Bartolome de las Casas in the case of Latin America. Decoloniality postures itself against the cultural hierarchy established by colonial matrices of power and knowledge, refusing a "blind acceptance... [or] a surrendering to North Atlantic fictions,"[22] but at the same time gathering heterogeneous views together, including that of the West. The project of decoloniality is creating space to listen and engage in local knowledges to learn more than what we now know and to be with each other in the diversity of our backgrounds. Decoloniality "connects and brings together in relation – as both pluri- and interversals – local histories, subjectivities, knowledges, narratives, and struggles against the modern/colonial order and for an otherwise."[23] The practice of decoloniality, then, is a practice of the imagination, of listening to different local knowledges and narratives, of learning from the different struggles of grassroots communities, and of reimagining (and living into) a world that is otherwise.

Religious education is part of this complexity. As I argue in Chapter One, religious education and catechesis were also co-opted as tools for empire in colonial history, subjugating a people through an education that teaches obedience. The Filipino theologian Karl Gaspar argues that the catechesis during that time had colonial inflections:

> by constantly being reminded of their indebtedness to God being his slaves, it reinforced the notion of the need for them to surrender their will to him. But in the

[21] Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, "Introduction" in *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 3.
[22] Mignolo and Walsh, 3.
[23] Mignolo and Walsh, 3.

> colonization-conversion process, it meant a transference of this surrender also to their temporal masters to whom they remained slaves because of the tribute and the polo.[24]

And on the other hand, religious education is also seen as a liberative force that resists the colonial and an imperial co-optation of Christianity that opens up the Gospel to a diverse world of different contexts and realities. This thread of religious education as liberative, synodal, and decolonial is seen throughout the chapters of this dissertation.

Religious education takes part in the work of imagination and reimagination. The religious educator Maria Harris writes that religious education is "seen as an activity of religious imagination"[25] where its subject matter is incarnated, revealed, and those partaking in the practice receive "the grace of power in order to help re-create a world of communion, of justice, and of peace."[26] Religious imagination makes available the past, the present, and the future in the imaginations of all who learn with one another in faith – an education that makes tradition accessible and orients towards visions of change.[27] In the context of the colonialization of the imagination of the dominated, a decolonial religious education frees the imagination to help re-envision a future in the rich frameworks of faith. Looking back to the gospels, one must remember that "Jesus of Nazareth was born and died in subjugation to the Roman Empire. His flesh, his body, was and remains marked by race, gender, culture, and religion."[28] In his public ministry, Jesus "lived and carried out his mission in the palpable tension between resistance to empire and desire for *basileia tou theou,* the reign of God."[29] In the context of empire, he gave

[24] Karl Gaspar, *Handumanan (Remembrance): Digging for the Indigenous Wellspring* (Quezon City: Claretian Communications Foundation, 2021)*,* 226.
[25] Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), xv.
[26] Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination,* 77.
[27] Cf. Mary Elizabeth Moore, *Educating for Continuity and Change* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983). See also "Education and Formation" of L. Callid Keefe-Perry's *Sense of the Possible: An Introduction to Theology and Imagination* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2023) for an extensive discussion on imagination and religious education.
[28] M. Shawn Copeland, *Enfleshing Freedom: Body, Race, and Being* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 58.
[29] Copeland, 59.

prophetic witness and denounced the abuses of an oppressive Roman empire. Religious education makes this present in the context of the everyday – what has been revealed in the past in the Christ event is continued to be revealed in the Spirit in the diverse contexts of church communities. The task of religious education is to discern the Spirit guiding the church today against oppression and domination and towards the flourishing and liberation of all.

Religious education is not only done in the confines of the school classroom, but it also happens in the context of a faith community. In *Fashion Me a People*, Maria Harris calls for a broader imagination of education, moving away from the "false identification of education with only one of its forms: schooling."[30] While religious education certainly takes place in the classroom setting, it also happens in the ecclesial context where the whole community engages each other and learns from one another in the framework of their faith and in the larger context in which they find themselves. She argues further that a

> genuine education in the church is toward creating and living more and more adequately as religious beings in the world. Education is toward the continuing remaking, re-creating, reconstructing, and reorganizing of our human experience, giving that experience meaning and helping us decide where to go and what to do next.[31]

A religious education in grassroots communities engage the people's religious imaginations grounded in the everyday with the intention not only to understand their current realities in the context of faith, but to help them discern how to act together and engage their realities.

C. Learning from Grassroots Communities

Grassroots church communities resist coloniality that has been internalized and replicated in ecclesial and educational structures. In their practices, they discern the Spirit at work in the

[30] Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Westminster, John Knox Press, 1989), 38.
[31] Harris, *Fashion Me a People,* 50.

everyday in communal discernment. In the Philippines during the time of martial law until today, basic ecclesial communities (BECs) bear witness to a way of being church that is more horizontal than hierarchical, having "much influence, especially among the grassroots strata of the church, both in rural and urban settings."[32] The BECs have been the venue for community-based religious education in which members engage one another on issues that affect the community, thinking about them in light of their Christian faith.

I argue that there is an operative pedagogy within the BEC's practice of communal discernment that has to be further examined. This pedagogy is a way for people to make-meaning with one another in the framework of their faith, for people to do theology together grounded in their experiences of the everyday. This pedagogy engages people's wisdoms and their lived faith in discernment. Using the biblical texts, BECs organized people into communal spiritual discernment that guided them in seeing how they are to respond to their situation. The religious education that is happening in these communities is a more horizontal model wherein people learn from and with one another. Furthermore, the formation of BECs is also a practice of space-making in community religious education. This is a model of participatory church that creates spaces of encounter where issues in civil society are brought into the context of a faith community, where the church community discusses matters of the larger community in which they find themselves, and in a more general sense, an encounter of people with one, an encounter of different worldviews with one another.

Grassroots communities have much to contribute to the practice of religious education. This dissertation will feature cases of grassroots communities, both ecclesial and otherwise, in an

[32] Catalino Arevalo, "Filipino Theology" in *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives*, ed. Karl Muller, Theo Sundermeier, Stephen Bevans, and Richard Bliese (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1997), 165.

attempt to see, through their practices, what it means to learn with one another in the Spirit – what it means to do a decolonial and synodal religious education.

II. The Question and the Argument of the Dissertation

With the complicated context of religion and colonialism in the Philippines discussed above, I ask, "What does a decolonial and synodal religious education look like?" Learning from the practices of grassroots church communities, this dissertation is an exercise of reimagining a religious education that resists coloniality and creates the possibility for all to learn with one another in the Spirit. Informed by a theology of synodality and the principles of critical pedagogy, I argue for a religious education that is a practice of creating space for an engagement with local theologies that are grounded in the everyday, for dialogue to emerge wherein all learn through diffraction, and for the voice of the Spirit to arise from a kind of dialogue that is not merely an exchange of ideas but a meeting and being with one another.

This dissertation will take its cues from synodality and critical pedagogies, two methodological leaps that can help rethink the methodology of religious education as well. I argue for a synodal religious education that is informed by developments in critical pedagogies.

Synodality, as a more participatory way of being church that involves communal listening, blurs the once rigid boundaries between a "teaching church" and a "learning church." The synodal way invites a rethinking of theological and teaching authority that opens up the space for voices once unheard to participate in matters concerning the life of the church. Critical pedagogies, on the other hand, foster the development of voice through a participatory model of education that capacitates the marginalized to recognize their agency. These educational models present a more democratic way of teaching and learning that sees the learner as an active agent in the world.

The role of the religious educator is seen as an initiator and facilitator of dialogue among people in communities of faith, while at the same time critically being part of that conversation. In contrast to a more top-down approach and a dialectical model of religious education, this modality of religious education is seen more horizontally as a practice that creates spaces of encounter and dialogue. In this dialogue, the hope is for a "third voice" to arise from the discussions among different group of people, informing how they are to move forward together in their practices for peace and justice.

I propose that this religious education is seen most concretely in participatory action research (PAR) which creates spaces for people to learn with one another for transformation. PAR expands the pedagogical imagination as it involves the people as active agents of the process of knowledge production, decolonizing the research process and presents a way of learning with one another in a way that is just. Using PAR as a way to do a synodal and decolonial religious education, grassroots church communities can listen to the Spirit together, guiding the church into new ways of knowing and being.

III. An Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation has six chapters building upon one another to construct and reimagine a religious education that seeks to create spaces for learning with one another in the Spirit.

The first chapter sets the scene by discussing shifts in the church and religious education in the long history of Christian presence in the Philippines. I contrast different pedagogies used in religious education in the Philippines – a pedagogy of empire on one hand and a pedagogy of resistance on the other. A pedagogy of empire is a co-optation of religious education that becomes a tool for empire and subjugation. A pedagogy of resistance, on the other hand, is a kind of learning developed in folk/popular Catholicism and in grassroots communities where

spaces are made for people to grapple with reality in terms of religious symbols, subvert dominant powers, and broaden the social imaginary in how they imagine a future otherwise.

The second chapter looks at the theological foundations for learning with one another. The recent developments in synodality argue for the possibility of a church learning with one another in the Spirit – a participatory church that listens together to the Spirit present in the everyday. This chapter highlights the synodal practices of basic ecclesial communities in the Philippines in an attempt to look at the dynamic of listening to the Spirit in the everyday. I argue that listening to the Spirit and the recent practice of conversations in the Spirit are along the lines of decoloniality in how these tap into the local theologies of the people and transform power relations in church culture and structures – synodality highlights a "bold pneumatology"[33] that listens to the Spirit in different places.

Chapter Three examines the educational foundations for a decolonial and synodal religious education. The principles of critical pedagogy reimagine education as a practice of space-making – a learning and reconfiguring of both social and physical space. Critical pedagogy is a decolonial practice in how it fosters critical awareness of hegemonic epistemologies while centering marginalized and subaltern voices in learning and teaching. Furthermore, critical pedagogy is a material-discursive practice that does not only aim to understand and reflect upon reality, but radically engage with it. As a material-discursive practice, education takes on a dialogical modality which is not only an exchange of ideas, but a being-with one another. In doing so, the new emerges out of the encounter of differences in diffractive learning.

The fourth chapter features participatory action research (PAR), a decolonial way of doing research, as a form of critical pedagogy that works to co-construct knowledge with

[33] Cf. Jos Moons, "The Holy Spirit as the Protagonist of the Synod: Pope Francis's Creative Reception of the Second Vatican Council," *Theological Studies* 84/1 (2023): 61-78.

communities. PAR uses an educational configuration to engage people in the process of knowledge production. It uses critical pedagogical methods to tap into "local ways of knowing"[34] and organizes people into a critical reflection of their realities. I propose PAR as a way for grassroots church communities to learn with one another. PAR expands the methodological and pedagogical imagination in the way that it creates spaces for people to learn with one another for transformation – it's a way of engaging local knowledges that gives rise to what Brinton Lykes calls the "third voice"[35] that emerges from the collaborative process.

The fifth chapter maps out a religious education that seeks to co-construct knowledge with one another. Bringing together the different threads of the dissertation, I argue for a religious education that is a practice of creating space for an engagement with local theologies that are grounded in the everyday, for dialogue to emerge wherein all learn through diffraction, and for the voice of the Spirit to arise from a kind of dialogue that is not merely an exchange of ideas but a meeting and being with one another.

The sixth chapter is a short proposal for a participatory action research for church communities in the Philippines. Gathering the principles discussed in the previous chapters of the dissertation, I discuss the prospects of doing PAR in light of the challenges and opportunities in the Philippine context today.

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[34] Cf. Gustavo Esteva and Madhu Prakash, *Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures* (London: Zed Books, 2014), 32.

[35] Cf. M. Brinton Lykes and Gabriela Tavara, "Feminist Participatory Action Research: Coconstructing Liberation Psychological Praxis Through Dialogic Relationality and Critical Reflexivity" in *Liberation Psychology,* Lillian Comas-Diaz and Edil Torres Rivera, eds (American Psychological Association, 2020) and M. Brinton Lykes, Martin Terre Blanche, and Brandon Hamber, "Narrating Survival and Change in Guatemala and South Africa: The Politics of Representation and a Liberatory Community Psychology," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 31/1-2 (2003): 79-90.

CHAPTER ONE

SETTING THE SCENE:

PEDAGOGIES OF RESISTANCE

Religious education reflects the complex relationship between Christianity and coloniality in the Philippines. While religious education opened up diverse engagements with Christian faith and Philippine culture in the past five hundred years, religious education was also co-opted by Spanish missionaries and used as a colonial tool to subjugate the people under the Spanish crown. In spite of the co-optation of religious education, however, grassroots communities since colonial times resisted colonial rule and subverted religious images and narratives in an attempt to reclaim a faith that liberates and aids them in their struggle against colonial oppression. The performance of the *pasyon*, which is the dramatization, reading, and singing of the story of Jesus Christ, demonstrates the dynamics of this reinterpretation – a reinterpretation of Christ as one with those who struggle towards freedom from colonial rule.

After the Spanish colonization of the Philippines formally ended, this colonial way of being church continues as it is internalized and replicated in ecclesial and educational spaces in local churches. As discussed more deeply in Chapter Two, a rigid divide between a "teaching" and a "learning" church marks the relationship between the clergy and the laity, and a clerical and hierarchical way of being church hinders people from learning with one another. Yet in spite of this, basic ecclesial communities (BECs) bear decolonial witness as they demonstrate a way of being church that learns with one another and acts together in doing justice in their local contexts. The growth of these communities during the time of martial law shows another form of resistance to a colonial church but also to the widespread oppression and violence brought about

by the Marcos regime, providing a space for people to do theology together and discern how they are to respond to the violence in the framework of the Christian faith.

I suggest that these two examples, i.e. the performance of the *pasyon* and the communal discernment of BECs, are practices that demonstrate a pedagogy of resistance. Similar to the theologian Nancy Pineda-Madrid's concept of a practice of resistance that claims space for the victimized to use "religious symbols" as a means for "ensuring their community's survival,"[36] a pedagogy of resistance creates space for faith communities to grapple with reality in terms of religious symbols, subvert dominant powers, and broaden the social imaginary in how they imagine a future otherwise.

In this chapter, I introduce these pedagogies and how they were enacted in the context of the Philippines. The first section introduces the concepts of the practice and pedagogy of resistance, inspired by Nancy Pineda-Madrid's *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez*, which will be a helpful framework for this chapter. The second section looks into the pedagogy of empire – of how religious education was co-opted as a tool for colonization. I examine the complex history of missionary activity and education during the Spanish colonial era: although initially condemning the oppressive colonial regime, missionary activity became a tool for colonial abuse and violence. The third section examines the *pasyon* as a pedagogy of resistance that subverts religious images and becomes a way for those performing it to make meaning out of their contexts and to engage their religious imaginations together towards liberation. The chapter concludes with a fourth section that introduces the basic ecclesial community and its practice of communal discernment that is in itself a pedagogy of resistance. The experience of

[36] Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 98.

the BECs is a major theme in this dissertation that is further developed in Chapter Two as it argues for communal discernment as a synodal practice.

I. From Practices of Resistance to Pedagogies of Resistance

In *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez*, Nancy Pineda-Madrid examines the different responses of faith and activist communities to the feminicide happening in Juarez, Mexico. The putting up of pink crosses where the victim's bodies were found was one of the foremost practices wherein the community remembers the dead and hold perpetrators accountable. This practice reimagines the concept of suffering and salvation in a communal sense grounded in the experience of the faith communities. Pineda-Madrid describes these practices as "practices of resistance," explaining that

> The victimized have created practices of resistance that demonstrate how individual persons and the community have identified the evil in their midst, have faithfully endeavored to subvert it and to dismantle it, and have used collective religious symbols as a means of entering into the living mystery of life, thereby ensuring their community's survival. These practices of resistance "claim a space" that enables those who suffer to be "present to" but not "consumed by" their experiences of suffering. As such, the claiming of a space enables the victimized to realize some release from their experience of evil, and in that very release they come to know a healing presence, God's saving presence.[37]

Practices of resistance are practices wherein the community claims a space where they can grapple with their reality, subvert it, and make sense of it in light of their faith. Pineda-Madrid identifies these practices as a form of popular religious practice, and by this, she means that "the 'symbols, practices, and narratives are *of the people,*'"[38] particularly the marginalized people in society. These practices also give way to the broadening of the social imaginary: "The practices of resistance that have arisen in response to the feminicide forge a new, emancipatory political,

[37] Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 98.
[38] Pineda-Madrid, 106; cf. Orlando Espin, *The Faith of Our People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997), 162.

social, and religious space and thus point to the primacy of a social dimension in our understanding of salvation."[39]

I argue that a practice of resistance could also take the form of *pedagogy* of resistance. Pedagogy often refers to the way people learn and teach in educational settings. But I want to broaden this notion of pedagogy in this dissertation and ground it in the peoples' realities, struggles, identities, narratives, and memories.[40] Pedagogy, as discussed in more detail in Chapter Three, involves the work of knowledge – how people learn with each other in the context of their realities.[41] A pedagogy of resistance, then, is how people learn in resistance to colonial and imperial ways of knowing that, as this chapter argues, only teaches submission and subjugation to hegemonic frameworks.

I suggest that the two practices mentioned in this chapter, i.e. the performance of the *pasyon* and the communal discernment in BECs are practices that demonstrate a pedagogy of resistance. In these practices, members of the faith community make spaces where they can learn with one another, reflect on their realities in the framework of their faith, and imagine and act towards a more just and peaceful future. These are popular educational practices that resist the realities of an imperial Christianity and an oppressive dictatorial regime. As demonstrated in this chapter, pedagogies of resistance have the following elements: 1) A pedagogy of resistance is a way of learning that comes from the people, through their local knowledges. 2) A pedagogy of resistance not only claims space but creates space through popular religious practice. 3) A pedagogy of resistance reinterprets religious symbols anew. 4) A pedagogy of resistance widens the social imaginary and forges new ways of thinking and doing liberation, emancipation, and

[39] Pineda-Madrid, 98.
[40] Cf. Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 88.
[41] Mignolo and Walsh, 88.

freedom. These themes are revisited at the end of the chapter in discussing the two practices the *pasyon* and the BECs.

In examining the pedagogies of resistance, it is useful to examine what they are resisting against. In the section to follow, I discuss the pedagogy of empire – a co-opted way of doing religious education that has become a tool for colonization and a practice within coloniality. The complex relationship between church and empire and the abuses that come from this position is the backdrop of this chapter's discussion.

II. Pedagogy of Empire

When Christianity arrived in the Philippine archipelago in 1521, through missionaries from Spain, the kind of Christianity that the natives encountered already had a complex relationship with empire. Just a few years after *Inter Caetera,*[42] the relationship between church and empire was governed under the framework of *Patronato Real* wherein

> Spain shall promote, maintain, and defend the Catholic religion in all its colonies (i.e., to support the whole work of evangelization) in exchange for being recognized by the Holy See as the 'patron' of the Church of the Indies (i.e. to possess a legitimate 'title to the colonies it had conquered').[43]

This relationship between church and state influenced missionary activity during the Spanish colonial era and lends itself to complexities in that relationship. On one hand, evangelization was made possible to the extent and reach provided by this relationship, but on the other hand, the church placed itself "at the service of both Majesties – of God and of the king."[44] The access to

[42] *Inter Caetera* is a papal bull issued by Pope Alexander VI in 1493 that granted the Catholic monarchs of Spain and Portugal the lands West of Europe, and "to instruct the aforesaid inhabitants and residents in the Catholic faith and train them in good morals." The Doctrine of Discovery is featured in the papal bull and the Treaty of Tordesillas that divided the lands between Spain and Portugal is a direct result of this bull. Cf. Emma Blair and James Robertson, *The Philippine Islands 1493-1803,* v. I, (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1903), 97-114.
[43] Daniel Pilario, "The Double Truth of (Colonial) Mission" in *500 Years of Christianity and the Global Filipino/a: Postcolonial Perspectives* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2024), 50.
[44] Pilario, 51.

big institutions of power at the time gives the church a unique position – on one hand, an opportunity of "defending the conquered peoples from the unconscionable subjugation by the *conquistadores*" and on the other hand being an automatic complicity "with imperial power."[45] The Filipino theologian Daniel Pilario argues that the colonial missions at the time are rife with double truth. The possibility of defending colonized peoples and being complicit with the colonial project both hold truth, and as seen below, the missionary activity in the Philippines held those two truths in tension. As the great Filipino historian Horacio De La Costa argues, "the record of the Church in the Philippines is a spotted one. It accomplished great things; it was also subject from time to time to great abuses."[46] In colonial history, missionaries served as the voice of conscience when the Spaniards first started colonizing the archipelago. But over time, missionaries became complicit in empire, as seen in how they educated the natives into Christianity.

The education in the Spanish colony had a dual system – there was one set of schools for the children of Spaniards and another set for the natives. The school for Spanish children was designed to replicate the schooling that was done in Spain while the school for the natives was meant to convert them to Christianity and maintain them in the faith. For the most part of Spanish rule, the education in arts and letters and even higher education was denied for most Filipinos.[47] What was available for Filipinos were mostly catechism schools – boarding schools where children study Christian doctrine, reading, writing, arithmetic, music, and art.

[45] Pilario, 51.
[46] Horacio De La Costa, *Readings in Philippine History*, (Makati: Bookmark, 1992), 56.
[47] Domingo Abella, "The State of Higher Education in the Philippines to 1863: A Historical Reappraisal," *Philippine Historical Review* 1/1 (1965): 6.

Most conquistadores "regarded the spread of Catholicism as an effective agent of implementing Spanish colonial control over the natives,"[48] as seen in their support for missionary activity that became the modality of colonial rule. The catechetical schools are found in *reducciones*, settlements created by Spanish colonizers that relocated indigenous people who they have converted to Christianity to a centralized area for easier social control. In these *reducciones,* missionaries governed the natives as they fostered town life that is centered around liturgy and other Christian practices, "educating them in the arts of civilization,"[49] while at the same time administering forced labor and collecting tribute. The prevailing theology at that time emphasized the need for conversion, for the salvation of souls – with the notion that outside the church, there is no salvation.[50] It is also important to note the context of Spanish Catholicism in the 1500s that still had the legacy of the *reconquista* fresh in their nation's collective memory. Evangelization and the conversion of those who are *infieles* and those they deem inferior to them provided Spanish sovereignty with the authority to colonize and subdue other peoples. This is operative in the Spanish colonization of Latin America and the Philippines.

According to Karl Gaspar, "Catechetical instruction conducted in the colonial era can rightly be labeled as indoctrination."[51] After converting the natives, catechesis was mostly just imposing what was written in the catechism and making sure that the converts memorize what was taught by the missionaries. "Whether the converts understood what was being explained or not was not a major concern of the missionary; what was important was to make sure that the lessons were orally imparted."[52] Moreover, what is being taught in these catechisms is

[48] John Leddy Phelan, *The Hispanization of the Philippines* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 23.
[49] Horacio De La Costa, "The Jesuits in the Philippines 1581-1959," *Philippine Studies* 7/1 (January 1959): 74.
[50] Karl Gaspar, *Handumanan* (Quezon City, Claretian Publications, 2021), 234.
[51] Gaspar, 226-227.
[52] Gaspar, 227.

submission: “by constantly being reminded of their indebtedness to God being his slaves, it reinforced the notion of thee need for them to surrender their will to him. But in the colonization-conversion process, it meant a transference of this surrender also to their temporal masters to whom they remained slaves because of the tribute and the polo.”[53] What the different missionaries created was domination and epistemicide – “It baptized allegedly free barbarians and sovereigns to make them submissive Christians, dominated the colonials of a Christian empire,”[54] through a colonial religious education.

Initially, however, the missionaries were quite critical of the oppressive colonial regime. The first Augustinian friars who came with the Legaspi expedition, for example, were already opposed to the colonial conquest. Andres de Urdaneta and his companions were “constantly updating the King on the abuses of the colonists,” reporting about the abuses of the human rights of the natives.[55]

In 1582, the first bishop of Manila, Domingo De Salazar, convened a synod to discuss the abuses of the colonial conquest. The synod was attended by superiors of religious orders and the leading colonists. In their discussion, they came to the decision to condemn slavery, to treat the natives more justly, and to stop the labor abuses done to them.[56] De Salazar, coming from the school of Salamanca, spent his life fighting for the human rights of indigenous peoples, as did Bartolome de las Casas in the Americas.[57] Writing to the king, De Salazar reports the abuses in the colony, criticizing “the Spanish conquistadores who used the *encomienda* system solely to

[53] Gaspar, 226.
[54] Enrique Dussel, “Epistemological Decolonization of Theology” in *Wrestling with God in Context,* M.P. Joseph, et al., eds., (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2018), 54.
[55] Pilario, 53.
[56] Gaspar, 168-170.
[57] Pilario, 52.

get rich quickly…while failing in their duty to preach the gospel."[58] Coming back to Spain in 1591, he continued advocating for the rights of indigenous peoples until his death.

Over time, missionaries became less critical of the abuses done to the natives and became abusers themselves, the very face of Spanish imperialism. With most *conquistadores* staying in the comforts of Manila, more missionaries took charge of the *reducciones* in far-flung pueblos. The historian John Leddy Phelan explained that the missionaries in these pueblos were "isolated from most social contacts with their own Christian culture and surrounded by temptation created by the power and prestige of their sacerdotal status, only the strong-willed and the inflexibly dedicated could maintain the high standards of their calling."[59] The mandate that missionaries have of preaching the gospel to all people is tainted and co-opted by their role in the colonial project. Margaret Guider argues that racism is the biggest obstacle to the missionary mandate of the church.[60] The same is true for the missionary enterprise during the colonial era and religious education was co-opted as a tool for building empire.

The double truth with colonial missions holds multiple truths in tension. While some missionaries engage in their evangelizing work and defend the rights of indigenous peoples, others use religious education as a tool for empire, abusing the authority and position that they hold. This pedagogy of empire is that which is resisted by the pedagogies of resistance discussed in this chapter.

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[58] Agnes Brazal, Cristina Lledo Gomez, and Ma. Marilou Ibita, "Philippine Christianity: 500 Years of Resistance and Accommodation" in *500 Years of Christianity and the Global Filipino/a: Postcolonial Perspectives* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2024), 4.
[59] Phelan, 39.
[60] Cf. Margaret Eletta Guider, "Moral Imagination and the *Missio ad Gentes*" in *Interrupting White Privilege* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2007).

III. The *Pasyon* as a Pedagogy of Resistance

In light of colonial abuses by the church at that time, the people subvert religious symbols and narratives into a creative reinterpretation of faith. A few centuries into the colonization of Spain, religious practices developed that reflected the growth of a popular religion and the subversion of religious symbols and narratives from a pedagogy of empire to a pedagogy of resistance. The text and the performance of the *pasyon* is one example of a practice that subverts colonial domination. Through the *pasyon*, members of the faith community reinterpret the Christ-story in the context of their own struggles while embodying the teachings of the story they perform. In contrast to the religious education that was done by colonial missionaries, the performance of the *pasyon* becomes a pedagogy of resistance.

The *pasyon* is the dramatization, reading, and singing of the story of Jesus Christ done annually during Holy Week. Around the 1700s, the earliest practice of the performance of this text was in the reading "by native lay leaders praying over the dying at their homes,"[61] but most commonly it is "chanted during Lent"[62] in chapels and family homes, lasting for days. Performances in the town plaza for the Holy Week passion plays also use this text. This tradition, which continues up until today, was started in the colonial period with two contradictory functions. For the Spanish missionaries, the passion play performed in the plaza was meant to "inculcate among the *Indios* loyalty to Spain and Church" and moreover, "encouraged resignation to things as they were and instilled preoccupation with morality and the afterlife rather than with conditions in this world."[63]

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[61] Jose Mario Francisco, "Voices, Texts, and Contexts in Filipino Christianity" in *Between Celebration and Critique* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2021), 26.
[62] Francisco, 26.
[63] Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979), 12. The word *Indio* is what the Spaniards called the natives.

For the natives, on the other hand, the reading and singing of the story of Jesus Christ was a continuation of precolonial epic traditions that were destroyed with the coming of the Spanish colonizers: "Filipinos nevertheless continued to maintain a coherent image of the world and their place in it through their familiarity with the *Pasyon*, an epic that appears to be alien in content, but upon closer examination in a historical context, reveals the vitality of the Filipino mind."[64] The *pasyon* gave lowland Filipinos a language for articulating their own values, ideals, and hopes for liberation. The theologian Mario Francisco describes the *pasyon* as the site where Filipino Christianity emerged – the production of native religious texts and the different ways these texts are read and performed shows how native culture enters Christian discourse and reimagines faith in the context of lowland Filipinos.

The *pasyon* has become like a mirror that shows the sentiments of native communities during the time of colonization while also showing a reinterpretation and subversion of the Christ-story in contrast to imperial Christianity. However, it is not enough to look only at the text of the *pasyon* to see how it is a pedagogy of resistance. The *performance* of the practice is as valuable: the dynamics of switching roles in the singing, the improvisation, the gathering of community, and the value of being heard by the whole of the neighborhood are all important points to consider. In the *pasyon,* prayer and worship are educational, and the faith community learns with one another in the performance of the practice.

[64] Ileto, 12.

A. The Pasyon as Text

The *pasyon* as a text is found in many versions and Philippine languages that have been compiled and edited by various authors and editors throughout time. Marilou Ibita recalls the different versions of the text that exist, with the date of their publishing:

> The earliest version is in Tagalog, the *Mahal na Pasion ni Jesuchristong Panginoon Natin na Tola*, written by Gaspar Aquino de Belen in 1703 and its fifth edition in 1760 is the oldest extant copy. Javellana's genealogical study shows that the Tagalog was directly translated into Filipino languages like Pangasinan (1855), Bicol (1867), Pampangan (1876), Iloko (1889), Hiligaynon (1892), Samareño (1929), and Ibanag (1948). A broken line links the Cebuano to the Tagalog from 1929.[65]

The most common text that is used to this day is the 1812 *Casaysayan ng Pasiong Mahal* (The Story of the Holy Passion), also known as *Pasyong Pilapil* or *Pasyong Henesis* – two versions named after their supposed editors, the original author(s) remain unknown today.[66] The text itself recounts the story of the passion beginning with an account of the creation of the world and concludes with a bit of the last judgment based on the book of Revelation in the bible. The text is not the soundest theology published and it has been criticized by other priests in the nineteenth century for its doctrinal errors. Moreover, "much of the verse is deplorably bad," says the Filipino literary critic Bienvenido Lumbera, "its author has no sense of rime [sic.] or rhythm."[67] However, the value of this text is seen in how it bears the "stamp of popular consciousness," as Reynaldo Ileto argues:

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[65] Ma. Marilou Ibita, "The Glocal Filipin@s and the Pasyon Through the Lens of Ethnicity," In *500 Years of Christianity and the Global Filipino/a,* Cristina Lledo Gomez, Agnes Brazal and Ma. Marilou Ibita, eds. (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan 2024, 84.

[66] The *pasyon* in its different editions has been discussed in various sources. Cf. Reynaldo Ileto, *Pasyon and Revolution* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979); Mario Francisco, "Voices, Texts, and Contexts in Filipino Christianity" in *Between Celebration and Critique* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2021), 15-32; Rene Javellana, *Casaysayan nang Pasiong Mahal ni Jesucristoon Panginoon Natin na Sucat Ipag-alab nang Puso nang Sinomang Babasa 1882* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988); Rene Javellana, *Mahal na Pasion ni Jesu Christong Panginoon natin na Tola ni Gaspar Aquino de Belen* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1990).

[67] Bienvenido Lumbera, "Assimilation and Synthesis (1700-1800): Tagalog Poetry in the Eighteenth Century," *Philippine Studies* 16 (1968): 639.

> The text itself, approved by authorities and printed in presses owned by the religious orders, may not seem to contain striking heresies or innovations. A purely textual analysis can reveal only a faint reflection of how the various pasyons shaped, and in turn were shaped by, society. Nevertheless, it is beyond doubt that a text like the *Pasyon Pilapil* was, for all purposes, the social epic of the nineteenth-century Tagalogs and probably other lowland groups as well.[68]

In the genre of Filipino social epics, the *pasyon* sees the story of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the greater context of creation and salvation history with powerful themes that talk about transitions from "darkness to light, despair to hope, misery to salvation, death to life, ignorance to knowledge, dishonor to purity, and so forth."[69] These images were used by peasant and revolutionary groups to talk about the transition from the "dark, miserable, dishonorable age of Spanish rule to a glowing era of freedom *(Kalayaan).*"[70] In the excerpt below, Jesus Christ, the main character in this epic, is characterized in a way that is relatable to the themes present above, as a character that the listeners can relate to in their struggle towards freedom:

Tanto rin naming lahat na	We all know, too
Bayang tinubuan niya	The town he hails from
Ito ay taga-Galilea,	He is from Galilee,
Taung duc-ha at hamac na	A Man poor and lowly
Naquiquisunong talaga	Who shelters in others' roofs
Ano pa at ang magulang	Furthermore, his father
Isang Anloague lamang	Is just a simple carpenter
Ualang puri't, ualang yaman,	Devoid of fame and wealth
Mahirap ang pamumuhay	Living in poverty
Ualang aring iningatan	Without property of his own.
Ualang iba cundi ito	His behavior and character
Asal niya't pagcatauo	Are just as we described
Nguni't cun itatanong mo,	But, you ask, can he claim
Na cun may pagcacaguinoo?	To be a gentleman of rank?
Ay ualang-ualang totoo	No, absolutely not.[71]

[68] Ileto, 14.
[69] Ileto, 14.
[70] Ileto, 14.
[71] *Casaysanan nang Pasiong Mahal ni Jesucristong Panginoon Natin, 1925 Edition:* 116:4-6 cited in Ileto, 14 translations by Ileto. The page and stanza that he uses in his book is based on the 1925 edition.

The subversive figure of Christ is seen in the contrast between his style of leadership and those of the missionaries who were perpetuating abuses in the pueblos. Christ was like the peasants who had humble origins and are struggling with them in the face of abusive power. Other themes like *kalayaan* are highlighted in the text, that shows a Jesus who forms a brotherhood and leads people to a new era of freedom. The text is seen as a social epic, which resonates with the central role of epics in Philippine literature before Spanish colonization. As a text, the *pasyon* reimagines the Christ story in the context of colonial oppression, as well as give language to the struggle towards freedom in a genre familiar to the people. As a social epic, like other epics in precolonial Philippine society, the *pasyon* relies heavily on its oral and performative elements. The *pasyon* as performance is helpful to examine in addition to the text. And the *pasyon* as a pedagogy of resistance can be seen much clearly when it is also examined as a performance. This practice of performing the *pasyon* endures through the centuries and is still current practice in the form of the *pabasa.*

B. The Pasyon as Performance: The Pabasa

The *pabasa* is the public singing of the *pasyon* where the text is chanted before an altar in a house during Lent, especially in Holy Week.[72] The chanting is done as a family tradition or to fulfill a family's *panata* for a particular intention. It occurs all day and night until they finish, amid the usual activities in the household.[73] Food is provided by the host family to the group of chanters and the neighborhood gathered in the house to listen to the performance. The audience from the neighborhood come and go depending on the sections of the *pasyon:*

> Sections of the *pasyon* varied in popularity. Audience interest tended to wane with the singing of the story of Cain and Abel, the lineages of Christ, or the *aral* –

[72] Francisco, 27.
[73] Francisco, 27.

> homilies addressed directly to the audience…In contrast, Christ's walking on water and his encounter with Mary on the Via Dolorosa with their magic and drama, were generally popular and well attended.[74]

In the performance of the *pasyon*, the chanters take turns in switching roles between the narrator and narratee. "Unlike the often-hidden narrator in biblical texts," the theologian Mario Francisco explains, "the *pasyon* narrator is overt, recounting events in the Christ story and addressing the listener directly in certain sections of the text."[75] Moreover, the narrator identifies as a "converted native" who wants to share what they have learned in Christian faith and the moral lessons coming from the passion narrative. The listener, on the other hand, is still "an enslaved Christian" who is in "dire need of conversion."[76] In the switching of the roles and the taking of turns, chanters assume different roles in the performance: in one stanza they may call sinners to repentance and in another they stay silent and listen to another group of chanters. They take on different characters in the different lines, like "a wailing Mary, a sly Herod, a despairing Judas, and even a pleading Jesus."[77]

The various shifts both in the narrator-narratee and the characters involves the participation of the chanters in different levels, blurring the lines between performer and audience, preacher and listener, and teacher and student. Francisco expresses what is happening in the chanters' performance well:

> The chanter literally speaks and appropriates the words of various characters – both good and evil – as well as those of the narrator and the listener. All these words are chanted by the same voice of the chanter, and thus preaching is completely internalized. No longer is the preacher an outsider nor the penitent a passive listener to the dramatic story of salvation played in the present within the chanter. Both are now one in the chanter, who preachers to himself or herself.[78]

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[74] Joseph Scalice, "Reynaldo Ileto's *Pasyon and Revolution* Revisited, a Critique," *Sojourn* 33/1 (2018): 42-43.
[75] Francisco, 28.
[76] Francisco, 28, Cf. Rene Javellana, *Casaysayan nang Pasiong Mahal ni Jesucristoon Panginoon Natin na Sucat Ipag-alab nang Puso nang Sinomang Babasa 1882* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1988), 76:1004.
[77] Francisco, 29.
[78] Francisco, 29.

Aside from the internalization that goes on in the chanting, the *pabasa* also amplifies the voices of the chanters with loudspeakers and envelopes the entire neighborhood in the sounds of the story of salvation, entering the public sphere. As already illustrated above, the *pasyon* gathers community. The performance gathers the neighborhood together in fellowship, but it also invites other people in the community to come and join them, or at least to listen to what they are chanting from wherever they are. The practice of the spoken word, amplified, is a practice of speaking to the public about the faith that they are performing.

C. The Pasyon as Resistance

The pedagogy of the *pasyon* stands in contrast to the pedagogy of colonial missionaries. For the latter, there was a clear hierarchical and racial ordering between the teacher/colonial master and the student/colonized. For the *pasyon*, the line between teacher and student becomes blurred and a different paradigm emerges where people participating in the practice learn with one another. In colonial education, subjugation is internalized by newly converts, painting an image of slavery to God and to their colonial masters. In the *pasyon*, Jesus is seen as someone who struggles with the colonized and forms community towards a future where everyone is free. While the missionaries' religious education is a tool for empire-building, the *pasyon* has been a religious education from below and is a pedagogy of struggle and resistance.

IV. The Pedagogy of Basic Ecclesial Communities

Another example of a pedagogy of resistance is seen in the organizing and communal discernment of the basic ecclesial communities in the Philippines. BECs have been the venue for community-based religious education in the Philippines since the 1960s until today. These

communities have been the venue for the church's educating for justice especially on human rights, a "third space" between the repressive dictatorship and the armed communist movements at the time. Alongside the development of these communities is the development of a theology of struggle and other forms of Filipino liberation theologies.

The pedagogy that is being practiced in BECs is a horizontal way of building communities. With an emphasis on the formation of lay leaders and the method of theological reflection being done, the pedagogy of the BEC acknowledges lay people as agents of evangelization and not merely as recipients of the church's services. As seen above, the pedagogy of theological reflection engages people's wisdoms and their lived faith in discernment. Using the biblical text, BECs organized people into groups of communal spiritual discernment that guided them in seeing how the Spirit is inviting them to act.

A. The Rise of BECs

The Marcos dictatorship in the 1960s and 70s provided the backdrop upon which the church became active in the public sphere. The church had a more active role in Philippine society as seen both in the hierarchy's resistance to the regime and most especially in how grassroots church communities have been organizing themselves in responding from the perspective of their faith. In 1972, citing increased violence from communist insurgents and Muslim separatist groups, Marcos declared martial law granting him absolute power over the military and all branches of government. From 1972 to 1986, the military imprisoned around 70,000, tortured around 34,000, and 3,240 were killed. In response to massive injustice and violations of human rights, basic ecclesial communities (BECs) organized themselves as a venue for an active non-

violent and liberationist response to martial law, which sets them apart from other groups engaged in armed struggle against state forces.

In 1967, there was a National Congress for Rural Development sponsored by the Catholic Church, which proposed a church that "goes to the barrios" and moves away from a "town centered" Catholicism.[79] This is an antecedent for the growth of the BECs, with missionaries and laypeople developing their own pastoral models from this meeting. Even before the declaration of martial law, there have already been stirrings among the poor, especially the rural poor. In light of the experience of poverty for the majority of Filipinos, there has been more critical awareness of the lack of human dignity by state authorities.

The earliest account of BECs is when the Maryknoll sisters initiated them in Davao, in the dioceses of Tagum and Mati, as early as 1967.[80] The sisters were inspired by the Latin American models of base communities and replicated them in their own ministry in Mindanao. The early models of these communities organized by the Maryknoll sisters and others are liturgical and development oriented. The village chapel is the focal point of the community and they were later organized and called *Gagmayng Kristohanong Katilingban*, a basic Christian community. These communities would have a celebration of the Word of God (*Kasaulogan sa Pulong sa Dios*) every Sunday, regularly have bible sharing sessions, and implement other pastoral programs encouraged by the parish priest and other parish volunteers. There were trainings from the parish for lay leaders, a volunteer catechetical program was set up, and livelihood programs were started. Religious education in these communities were seen in terms of the formal catechetical programs facilitated by volunteers, the training of lay leaders, and the

[79] Warren Kinne, *A People's Church: The Mindanao-Sulu Church Debacle* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), 103.
[80] Cf. Karl Gaspar, "Localization Resisting Globalization: Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) in the Postmodern Era," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 38/4 (2001): 316-350.

forming of community in general (later on, community organizing elements were introduced by Amado Picardal). From Davao, this rapidly spread throughout the Mindanao, given the efforts of the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference, the local conference of bishops in that region. From there, communities adapted this model and took on different identities based on the context of their localities.

The work of the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (MSPC) is key in the growth and flourishing of BECs in the region. The MSPC was a body of bishops, priests, religious, and lay representatives from 20 ecclesiastical jurisdictions that met every three years since 1971. They describe themselves as a form of communion between different churches and a "forum of ideas" where delegates share best practices and discuss common problems they face in the region, founded with the intention of filling in the gap of the government in social development with pastoral ministry.[81] From 1971 to 1983, their major priority was in building Christian communities in the region. They strived for the following ideals as they were building community: "witnessing, worshipping and serving communities," "self-governing, self-nourishing, and self-sustaining," with "a consideration of the issue of justice and human rights as integral to the living of the gospel."[82] One of the major recommendations that was raised in the earliest meetings and echoed throughout the latter gatherings of the conference was for the "adequate support to the development programs for training lay leaders for a more effective and fuller cooperation of the laity in the service and in the building up of the Christian community."[83] Later on in 1977, there was an emphasis from merely building communities towards "building

[81] Kinne, 77.
[82] Kinne, 77.
[83] Kinne, 79.

communities towards justice and love."[84] Community building through lay leadership is a hallmark of the BECs formed in the Mindanao-Sulu region.

The MSPC lasted for a few years and has done great work organizing communities and being a forum where BECs could exchange their ideas and enhance their practices together. However, in 1982, along with a many ideological complexities in civil society at that time, the question of violence and collaboration with armed underground groups, the bishops at the conference began to disassociate. This left the conference ineffective without their support.[85] The communities continued, however, in various ways. Soon, the culture of the BEC movement spread north of Mindanao. Kathleen Nadeau, for example, has observed the BECs in Cebu in her book *Liberation Theology in the Philippines*. Later on, BECs will flourish in Luzon after the dictatorship.

B. The Pedagogy of BECs

Religious education, thought of more broadly, is involved in the formation of BECs, the formation of lay people, and engages the people's wisdom and faith. I argue that the education found in these communities is more horizontal than top-down than was seen in previous models. In this pedagogy, as seen below, religious education is construed as an engagement with the human experience of the community through social analysis and theological reflection, oriented towards action. Informed by the AsIPA model that is similar to the see-judge-act paradigm, the BECs discern how they are to engage with their realities in the framework of Christian faith. Furthermore, this pedagogy is a deeper listening to how the Spirit is guiding the church. In the politically charged landscape of that time, this discernment goes beyond ideological agendas and

[84] Kinne, 82.
[85] Kinne, 92.

draws deeper into a Christian vision as revealed in tradition and Scripture, but also through their human experiences.

The pedagogy of BECs is an engagement with the human experience of the community through theological reflection and social analysis. In discerning what to become as a community and what to do, this pedagogy engages local knowledges and puts them in dialogue with the frameworks of faith. This can be seen particularly in the BECs in Francisco Claver's diocese in Bukidnon who engage farmer theologians and lay people into communal discernment.[86] Take for example how a community in Kibawe were discerning seeking justice against land grabbers. In contrast to the other group in the community that approached the issue through a more "Alinsky issue-oriented method and approach to social questions,"[87] they used a method that was more based on Christian faith. They started to have more regular sessions where theological reflection which helped them to think and discern how they can approach the issue. They were asking the questions, "What does our faith say to the problem, what does it advise us to do about it?" in other words, "What is the Spirit of God telling us about how we should act in regard to the problem at hand?"[88] This method is informed by the Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA) that is "a methodology of change based on dialogue about ideas from discernment-prayer on social problems, participation in decision-making, planning acting, and co-responsibility in executing decisions and evaluating action on them."[89] The method invites the community to analyze different situations as they are situated in the life of the community and reflect on it in the perspective of faith: the question asked, "What does our faith say to the problem, what does it

[86] Francisco Claver is a Jesuit professor of sociology and anthropology, a human rights activist, and one of the founders of the East Asian Pastoral Institute, Quezon City, Philippines. He was ordained bishop and was assigned to the Diocese of Malaybalay in the southern part of the Philippines. Much of his reflections on basic ecclesial communities cited in this work is based on his pastoral work in Malaybalay.
[87] Francisco Claver, *The Making of a Local Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 85.
[88] Claver, *The Making of a Local Church,* 83-84.
[89] Claver, *The Making of a Local Church,* 83.

advise us to do about it?" which in other words also asks, "What is the Spirit of God telling us about how we should act in regard to the problem at hand?"[90] The combination of the situational analysis and the theological reflection is what Claver would identify as the spiritual discernment.[91] The community then makes a decision, acts upon it, and evaluates the intervention for further reflection. In 1981, the pastor of the community in Kibawe was assassinated by five masked men but the community he helped organize kept on discerning, engaging, and denouncing abuses done by the military and the land grabbers against their human rights.

This pedagogy is also a discernment of the Spirit at work in the everyday life of the community. Beyond any ideological agendas, the BEC listens more closely to the Spirit guiding the church. In doing so, the BECs demonstrate a religious education in the Spirit. In another community in Claver's diocese, people were discerning the great attraction brought about by joining the armed revolution against the dictatorial regime and whether or not they should join them. They talked about it in their gatherings and bible sharing sessions. However, at the end they concluded: "We Christians have our faith to guide us in the decisions we take for our life. It is not an ideology in the sense of the Marxist one," which they say has clear cut solutions to everything, "That is not true with us Christians. At every step we take, we have to pause and ask if what we decide to do is according to our faiths' demands for moral action or not."[92]

These communities, along with Christian social movements, have been considered as a "third space" in the resistance – neither belonging to the space of the military dictatorial regime nor the space of the armed revolutionary groups. Nadeau says that the development strategy of

[90] Claver, *The Making of a Local Church,* 84.
[91] Claver, *The Making of a Local Church,* 84.
[92] Claver, *The Making of a Local Church,* 106.

the BEC movement "entails a slow and long process of social and structural transformation that aims to transform the world capitalist system by starting with changing communities on the peripheries,"[93] in contrast to what she describes as more rapid issue-based approaches that have a more urgent pace of social analysis and transformation.

Aside from the pastoral method described above, Claver also observes that a spirituality of discernment is a big part of the pedagogy of the BECs with the Spirit being at the center of discernment: "The criterion in judging decisions made in the church is seen to be not how the majority votes but how any particular decision of the community fits in with the thinking of the Spirit."[94] His insistence of discernment as a communal spiritual practice, not only an individual one, has contributed to a spirituality of discernment, understood under a wider spirituality of communion. Claver envisions a church of communion and communication – "In a church that is to be communion, mutual listening is a sine qua non for everyone: laity listening to hierarchy, hierarchy listening to the laity, and all listening to the Spirit."[95] His vision of communion is a church that is always in dialogue, always listening.

C. Inculturation rather than Colonization

This discernment does not happen in a vacuum, but within a local culture that the people bear. For Claver, inculturation *is* dialogue: "inculturation, when one comes down to it, is the dialogue we must foster at every level of the Church between the people and the Spirit."[96] The way of inculturation is as simple as "letting them, the people and Spirit, dialogue freely."[97] In his

[93] Kathleen Nadeau, *Liberation Theology in the Philippines Faith in a Revolution* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 33.
[94] Claver, *The Making of a Local Church,* 37.
[95] Claver, *The Making of a Local Church,* 38.
[96] Francisco Claver, "Inculturation as Dialogue," in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries,* ed. Peter Phan (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 100
[97] Claver, "Inculturation as Dialogue," 101.

ministry as bishop, and seen evidently in the Asian synod, Claver was focused on inculturation, convinced that "the church cannot be credible if it comes to the people fully clad in Western garments, speaking a foreign tongue, and hardest of all, seemingly disdaining to assume a native face."[98] For him, the concern was how to make the Gospel truly enter into the cultures of the people without the people seeing it merely as a foreign intrusion.

Claver's concern for inculturation is linked with his vision for lasting social change requiring the active participation of the people – "This in turn led him to reflect with the people of Bukidnon on their own culture – on the valued ways of thinking, feeling, and acting which they had inherited from their parents and their community – to analyze them in the light of the Gospel, and when necessary to deepen and purify them."[99] Inculturation is a continuous process for Claver, a dialogue between the values of both faith and culture.[100] He puts into dialogue the ideals and the actualities of both, not putting one above the other, but of seeing the two as mutually informing and transforming one another.

What is being developed in the method done by the BECs is a way of thinking about the struggles of the people in light of their Christian faith. A Filipino liberation theology is being enfleshed in the practices of the communities. Eleazar Fernandez sees the history of the Filipino people as a history of struggle: "a struggle to form a nation that truly embodies the sentiments and aspirations of the people" whose dreams are always "nipped in the bud by their supposed liberators."[101] The theology of struggle reflects on the suffering of the people, hears the people's cry and sees the people as agents in their political struggle.

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[98] Claver, *The Making of a Local Church,* 14.
[99] John Carroll, "Bishop Claver's Vision of the Church" in *Becoming a Church of the Poor,* Eleanor Dionisio, ed. (Quezon City: John J. Carroll Institute on Church and Social Issues, 2011), 17.
[100] Cf. Claver, *The Making of a Local Church,* 112-113.
[101] Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 8-9.

V. Conclusion: Pedagogies of Resistance Rising

From the time of Spanish colonization where popular movements, such as the *pasyon* and BECs, reimagine the faith of their colonizers to the time of the US colonization and its aftermath where the elite continue to oppress the masses, the history of the people is a history of struggle. Jesus is seen as someone who suffers and struggles with the people, and it is to Jesus that the people turn to in their popular devotions and in their own struggles.[102] The pedagogy of the BECs and the *pasyon* turns towards the people's struggles and reflects on these in light of their faith. The religious education that is demonstrated here is more inductive and has a preferential option for the poor in its insistence on focusing on responding to injustices. Most importantly, at its base, the pedagogy of resistance is a model where people learn with one another and be with one another in light of the common struggles that they go through.

At the beginning of this chapter, I bring up Pineda-Madrid's concept of a practice of resistance wherein the faith community claims a space where they can grapple with their reality, subvert it, and make sense of it in light of their faith. She notes that these practices are a form of popular religious practice that arises from the people and broadens the social imaginary as it reinterprets religious symbols anew. I also suggest at the beginning that the practices of resistance can become pedagogies of resistance when people learn with one another – resisting colonial and dominant frameworks, subverting colonial narratives, and creating spaces for local knowledges and theologies to emerge. I conclude this chapter by raising some important points about the pedagogy of resistance as seen through the practices of the *pasyon* and the BECs:

A pedagogy of resistance comes from the people and arises from the people's knowledge. The *pasyon* arises from the people as they chant the Christ-story; while continuing the tradition

[102] Fernandez, 100.

of social epics, they connect their experience of suffering with that of Christ. The formation of basic ecclesial communities is an expression of people in solidarity with one another and engages the people's knowledge. As acts of resistance, these practices are seen in opposition to hegemonic forces – the *pasyon* resists the colonial religious education that reinforces Eurocentric knowledge and imperial Christianity, the BECs resist a rigid and hierarchical church that pays no attention to people's realities by living out a more horizontal expression of church.

A pedagogy of resistance does not only claim space but makes space where people can learn with one another. In the absence of structures and opportunities for people to learn with one another, a religious education arises from the people's need to make sense of their realities and to act in creating a more just world. The performance of the *pasyon* as a popular religious practice creates the space for people to learn with each other as they blur the lines of theological authority. The space created by BECs is a venue where people can learn with one another, where their voices are valued and heard, and where they reflect with one another in their shared faith. A religious education from below is an alternative to the normative forms of education that are usually hierarchical and understand power from the top down.

A pedagogy of resistance reinterprets religious symbols anew. Like the powerful image of the pink crosses that Pineda-Madrid reflects on, the religious symbols are reinterpreted so much in the context of Philippine Christianity. With its emergence in the chanting of the *pasyon,* one can see how Filipino culture and Christian discourse are in dialogue in the performance of the practice and how they make something new out of what was available to them. The BECs, with the reality of the community at the center of their discussions, reimagines religious symbols in terms of what is urgent and what is important to the community's culture and way of life with each other.

A pedagogy of resistance widens the social imaginary. These practices forge a new way of thinking about liberation, emancipation, and freedom. These practices foster new ways of thinking about justice and reimagining a more just world. The imagination of the *pasyon* provided lowland Filipinos with a language to articulate their desires for freedom under colonial rule, seeing Jesus Christ as a co-struggler in their suffering. The BECs reimagine not only different ways to respond to social injustices, but also reimagine different ways of being church that is a church of the poor that is different from the normative way.

Given what has been learned about a pedagogy of resistance from the two practices in this chapter, how can religious educators imagine a decolonial and synodal religious education? The next two chapters will discuss the building blocks for a pedagogy of resistance for today: synodality and critical pedagogy.

CHAPTER TWO

LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT:
SYNODALITY AND SOME THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
FOR LEARNING WITH ONE ANOTHER

The possibility of all those in the church learning with one another is a theological matter that requires a rethinking of theological authority and the practices of communal discernment in the Spirit. The recent developments in the practice of synodality encourages this rethinking, creating spaces for a more participatory church that listens together to the Spirit present in the people's lived realities. This chapter explores these developments and lays down the theological foundations for the pedagogy that is being developed in this dissertation.

Synodality is a departure from colonial ways of being church. One of the marks of colonial Christianity is a rigid divide between a "teaching church" and a "learning church," which has suppressed voices and subjugated members of the church, particularly the laity. As the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff puts it,

> On the one hand is the *ecclesia docens* that knows all and interprets all; on the other hand, is the lay person who knows nothing, produces nothing, and receives everything, that is, the *ecclesia discens*…. The ontological vocation of every person is denied, that is, to be a participant and not a mere spectator in the history of salvation.[103]

Synodality departs from this rigid hierarchy and rethinks core concepts in ecclesial life like theological and teaching authority, hierarchy, power, and participation. In other words, synodality is an invitation to rethink who gets to teach, learn, participate, and have a say in

[103] Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutionalized Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 142.

church matters. Instead of the rigid and hierarchical divide, synodality levels out the field, reimagining the people of God learning and serving each other.

In the Philippine setting, the discussion on synodality is valuable for a local church that has seen colonial rule and up until today is marked by colonial ways of governance and decision-making that have been internalized and reproduced in present-day church structures. In the national process of the Synod on Synodality in 2022, the synodal team reached out to those whom they call the "existential peripheries" – those at the margins of society and those who do not usually engage or participate within usual church activities.[104] The report showed glaring indications of coloniality in the Philippine church. "Many said it was their first time to be consulted and be listened to," the report says, with "many dioceses acknowledged the failure of the church in general and the priests, in particular, to journey with their flock and to reach out to so many people, especially *mga nasa laylayan* (the existential peripheries), the poor, and the marginalized."[105] I want to highlight two main issues of concern that the report brought up, showing the dynamics of coloniality in Philippine church life. The first concerns how the local church understands authority and participation:

> Clericalism, elitism, and unapproachability dominate the relationship between the laity and the clergy. Interestingly, lay leaders also tend to imbibe this clericalistic way of handling authority in relation to the rest of the faithful…. Authority tends to

[104] Representatives from the following were consulted, as mentioned on page 2 of the Synodal Report: "LGBTQ+ (lesbians, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gender, queer), farmers, fisherfolks, PWDs (persons with disabilities, including deaf mute), PDLs (persons deprived of liberty), government officials, *barangay* (village) leaders, politicians, single parents, unwed mothers, cohabiting couples, people recovering from substance abuse and other forms of addiction, youth, students, teachers, school staff, public transport drivers, laborers (miners, construction workers, carpenters, ranch workers), daily wage earners (vendors, laundry women, candlemakers, etc.), media people, medical frontliners, members of other Christian denominations, IPs (indigenous peoples), OFWs (overseas Filipino workers) and their families, inactive Catholics, those who have left the Catholic church, women, street children, street families, those afflicted with HIV-AIDS, other religions (especially Muslims), migrants, elderly, broken families, atheists, CICL (children in conflict with the law), children with special needs, policemen, *barangay tanods* (village watchmen), civic organizations, NGOs (non-government organizations), undocumented people, business people, house helps." in Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Salubong (Welcoming Encounter): The Philippine Catholic Church Synodal Report* (15 August 2022), https://synodphilippines.com/salubong-the-philippine-catholic-church-synodal-report/, henceforth referred to as *Salubong* with page number.

[105] *Salubong*, 3.

> rest solely on the priests and bishops. There are also some lay leaders who tend to monopolize leadership positions and make succession very difficult for the younger generation of leaders. Church management is perceived to be fraught with irregularities and inconsistencies, and tends to be authority-centered, inefficient in the administering of temporal goods, and dismissive of the views and values of the marginalized poor. People feel that in general, there is hardly any consultation with the faithful before appointments for church leadership roles are finalized.[106]

A clear line is being reported between the laity and the clergy, similar to how Boff described the teaching and the learning church forty years ago. The authority being monopolized by priests, bishops, and lay leaders prevent the church from being more participatory, to the detriment of the marginalized poor as the document stated above.

The second issue concerns how decisions are being made in the church. Similar to what has been said about authority above, decisions are being made in a top-down manner that disregards processes of prayer and communal discernment:

> Decisions are hardly ever made based on collective discernment. The final decisions are usually made by the church leaders, in particular by the bishops and priests, and that, in most instances, decision-making processes tend to favor the opinions and preferences of the affluent and powerful. They also note a lack of transparency on issues and on how decisions are being made…. Almost all matters having to do with the life of the church are characterized as top-down in their approach. There is a perceived lack of spiritual conversations. The common impression is that church administration does not give as much importance to prayer and communal discernment. Impunity and unilateral decision-making result in confusion and disorientation during the "changing of the guards" (reshuffle of parish priests). The sustainability of pastoral processes does not seem to be a major concern.[107]

Noteworthy in the excerpt from the report is how the decisions that are made in the church are not only made solely by church leaders, but "tend to favor the opinions and preferences of the affluent and powerful."[108] This is a challenge to the church as decision-making and communal discernment are not done just for the sake of it, but these practices lead to decisions on how the

[106] *Salubong*, 8.
[107] *Salubong,* 8.
[108] *Salubong,* 8.

church should be in the world and, in particular, these are decisions that concern the church's mission especially with the poor and marginalized. The compromising of decision-making processes is also a compromising of the church's participation in God's mission.

While decision-making is being monopolized by those who hold power in the church, the report also identifies pockets in the church where people can actively participate: "Parish organizational meetings, pastoral assemblies – diocesan, vicarial, and parish levels, and including BEC prayer gatherings and regular meetings are seen as structures that allow for active participation in the life of the church."[109] Furthermore, the report describes the BEC (basic ecclesial community) as the "proper space on which we can cultivate a culture of encounter and through which we can reach out to sectors, especially those marginalized and neglected."[110] These spaces and the practices that are being done by church communities in those spaces are featured in this chapter as case studies for the possibility of synodality in the local church.

I start this chapter with the 2022 synodal report to describe the current situation in the church in the Philippines – the setting upon which synodality is being introduced. The issues of authority, participation, and decision-making/communal discernment are highlighted in this chapter as challenges for synodality. In its task of reforming the church from its colonial and clericalist ways, synodality must consider the issues above in imagining the reform of church structures and cultures.

In light of these challenges, synodality is seen as a chance to imagine a different way of being church. What is being highlighted in synodality is the possibility of a church that is grounded upon the realities of the people, rooted in the Word of God, and oriented towards mission. At the heart of this theology of synodality is the Spirit: synodality rests upon the

[109] *Salubong*, 8.
[110] *Salubong,* 9.

conviction that the Spirit is still guiding the church today. The Spirit is discerned in the experiences and wisdom of all the faithful who make up the people of God and at the same time, the same Spirit animates the people into mission and renewing the face of the earth.

This chapter lays down the theological foundations of a decolonial and synodal religious education that is being developed in this dissertation. Synodality creates the conditions for church communities to learn with one another by 1) engaging the authority of the everyday in communal discernment and theological reflection and 2) forming the church in conversations in the Spirit that listens to the Spirit and the Spirit's invitation for the church in mission. This chapter is divided into three sections: the first problematizes the notion of the everyday as a theological concept, showing how a synodal method engages people into reflection upon their realities; the second focuses on the Spirit and the practice of listening to the Spirit as a decolonial practice; the third wraps up the chapter by spelling out the foundations and the limitations of the synodal approach for religious education.

I. The Immediate Spaces of Our Lives: Synodality and the Everyday

Although there have been many developments in the practice of synodality during the papacy of Francis, synodality is not a new invention.[111] Synodality is a retrieval of being church from the early church and has since been recovered in the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council. In the early church, synodal practices were seen in how the *ecclesia* gathered together in communal

[111] Addressing the Synod of Bishops in 2015, Pope Francis has remarked strongly that "It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium," setting the tone for synodality as a priority in his papacy. The landmark document *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* was published by the International Theological Commission three years after. Different synods have been convoked during his papacy that demonstrated the ecclesiology of synodality – from the Synod on the Family in 2015, Synod on Youth in 2018, to the Synod of the Amazon in 2019. Perhaps the biggest development in the papacy of Francis is the Synod on Synodality that has a three-year process starting from 2021 and ending in 2024. The current synod invites the whole church in a process of discernment on how the church can become a more synodal church moving forward.

discernment aimed towards fulfilling the church's mission in the world, with local churches being in communion with one another, embodying one church.[112] The Eastern churches are witnesses to the continuity of being a synodal church from the very beginnings of ecclesial life until today.[113] Synodality is now being recovered in the Roman Catholic church since Vatican II – a council whose teachings and ways of being church are still being received in the church today. Vatican II's ecclesiology strongly emphasizes the church as a pilgrim people of God – a people guided by the Spirit who reveals and guides the church today. As a way of being church, synodality invites more participation and dialogue among all the members of the church journeying together as a pilgrim people of God.[114] This is a departure from an ecclesiology that is rigidly hierarchical and clerical as seen in imperial forms of Christianity.[115] Instead of the rigid hierarchy, synodality reimagines a church that listens to each other, a levelling out of the power dynamics in church structures and cultures.

Church communities have already been demonstrating an understanding of what it means to be a synodal church in their own contexts and much can be learned from these communities about synodality. The basic ecclesial communities (BECs) in the Philippines have and are still demonstrating an understanding of synodality in the way they have organized themselves and discerned as a community. I argue that their practices, especially the practice of communal

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[112] Cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (2 March 2018), 24-30. Also see Lawrence Culas, "The Spirit and Vision of Synodality Present in the Early Christian Communities," *Church in India on the Synodal Path,* Anthony Lawrence et al., eds. (Bengaluru: ATC Publishers: 2022), 149-162.
[113] International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 31. Also see Francis Thonippara, "Synodality among the Christians of St. Thomas Tradition and the Challenges," *Church in India on the Synodal Path,* Anthony Lawrence et al., eds. (Bengaluru: ATC Publishers: 2022), 236-249.
[114] The image of the church as a pilgrim people of God is discussed at length in the second chapter of *Lumen Gentium* and also as a people gathered in mission in *Ad Gentes*. Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964) and Second Vatican Council, *Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church Ad Gentes* (7 December 1965); Also see Cristoph Theobald, "The Principle of Pastorality at Vatican II," *The Legacy of Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015), 26-37.
[115] Cf. Part II of Jose Mario Francisco, *Between Celebration and Critique: Snapshots from 500 Years of Philippine Christianity* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2021) and Leonardo Boff's *Church, Charism, and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (New York: Crossroads, 1985).

discernment, resemble a theology of synodality that focuses on the everyday – a theology that guides people into affirming the revelatory nature of the everyday, putting marginalized stories at the forefront of reflection, discerning the Spirit in the everyday, and engaging the everyday in mission.

The practice of communal discernment demonstrates an understanding of synodality that engages the everyday. The practice of communal discernment involves members of the church community in a prayerful process of decision-making and co-responsibility in carrying out the decisions made. As seen in the first chapter, basic ecclesial communities in the Philippines have been practicing communal discernment since the 1960s and 70s when there was a growth in these communities in the country during a time of dictatorship. Liberationist BECs were centered on a method of communal discernment that listened to the Spirit in the realities of the people. Influenced by AsIPA – the Asian Integrated Pastoral Approach, members of BECs gathered in prayerful discernment wherein they discuss matters that are important to them and collaborate with one another to transform their realities according to the promptings of the Spirit as encountered in Scripture, prayer, analysis, and reflection.

The AsIPA model can be described as a pastoral cycle which involves 1) an analysis of the situation, 2) theological reflection, 3) decision-making, 4) action, and 5) evaluation. Similar to the see-judge-act paradigm and influenced by the Lumko Institute in South Africa, AsIPA was developed to reflect on the social realities of Asia in light of faith. AsIPA has been described by the bishop Francisco Claver[116] as a methodology of change based on dialogue, participation, and

[116] Francisco Claver is a Jesuit professor of sociology and anthropology, a human rights activist, and one of the founders of the East Asian Pastoral Institute, Quezon City, Philippines. He was ordained bishop and was assigned to the Diocese of Malaybalay in the southern part of the Philippines. Much of his reflections on basic ecclesial communities cited in this work is based on his pastoral work in Malaybalay.

co-responsibility.[117] While BECs at that time were very much influenced by the community organizing methods that other groups were using at that time – those that were influenced by the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire or the organizing principles of Saul Alinsky (these were more pointed approaches and issue-oriented) – the BECs went further and engaged its members in a slow and long process of social change that listens to the Spirit.[118] Take for example how community members in the church in Kibawe in Mindanao were discerning how to respond to land grabbers during the time of martial law. The farmers who made up the community started to have more regular sessions where they did theological reflection and bible reading sessions which helped them to think and discern how they can approach the issue. They were asking the questions, "What does our faith say to the problem, what does it advise us to do about it?" in other words, "What is the Spirit of God telling us about how we should act in regard to the problem at hand?"[119] They responded in many ways – organizing farmers unions, starting community education programs, and speaking out against different injustices on blackboards outside the church. Co-responsibility and participation are seen here in how they assigned different tasks to one another according to the capacity that they are able.

In this section, I want to elaborate on the three movements of the BEC's practice of synodality and their focus on the everyday. First, the BECs ground themselves in the reality of the everyday which affirms the revelatory nature of the everyday and privileges narratives that have often been left out of decision-making in church governance. Second, given the revelatory nature of daily life, the BEC listens to the Spirit working in their midst, trying to understand how the Spirit is guiding the church in that particular context. They employ a contextual reading of

[117] Francisco Claver, *The Making of a Local Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 83.
[118] Kathleen Nadeau, *Liberation Theology in the Philippines: Faith in a Revolution* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 33.
[119] Claver, *The Making of a Local Church,* 83-84.

the bible and dialogue with the authority of the everyday in this discernment. Finally, the goal of this communal discernment is not only for the sake of understanding, but it is oriented towards mission – how the Spirit is calling them to an engagement with reality in practice. I suggest that these three movements in communal discernment show a theology of synodality that is focused on the everyday.

A. The Focus on the Everyday

BECs are formed in the context of the everyday life of its members. The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) describes the BECs as communities that "consciously strive to integrate their faith and their daily life….Poverty and their faith urge their members towards solidarity with one another, action for justice, and towards a vibrant celebration of life in the liturgy."[120] The integration between faith and the everyday is a crucial characteristic of these communities.

As established in the first chapter, BECs emerged under the conditions of the everyday, and in particular, in the turbulent socio-political situation leading up to the martial law period in the 1960s and 70s. In studying BECs, the focus must not only be the everyday life in itself, but more importantly, special attention must be given to the way BEC members engage with the everyday – their intentional and conscious way of making meaning of their realities and discerning together their response to these in the framework of their faith. In their discernment, without them knowing it, they already demonstrate how to be a synodal church that grounds ecclesial life within the everyday and puts the everyday at the center of decision-making and theological reflection. In contrast to more conventional ways of being church that are top-down,

[120] Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Pasay City: St. Paul Publication, 1992), no. 139.

the way decisions and theological reflection is done in BECs involve more listening with the people. In a national meeting with BEC organizers and leaders, one community leader has described the difference between old ways of being church and the way of being church that the BECs are demonstrating:

> A community bereft of its faith dimension is not a Christian community. Fortunately, the problem of religion especially among the lower strata of Philippine society is not so much the absence of faith in the hearts of the people. However, the expression of this faith derived for the most part from the language of foreign cultures and of times past have tended to divorcee their faith from present realities…. Thus the quest for the "living and true" God who is Emmanuel to the outcast, the oppressed and the forgotten becomes a vital component in their search for a fuller unity among these communities.[121]

The attention given to the context of the everyday in this approach is crucial as it shows a shift in an understanding of church – from a colonial and detached church towards a decolonial witness that is engaged and reflective upon the people's realities. While other discourses about synodality, especially in the Global North, may only focus on participation and representation in ecclesial life, understanding synodality in the South have heavy implications on the engagement with people's realities and the incarnation of the Christian faith in a people's culture and struggle for peace and justice. In the 1974 synod of Asian bishops, the discussion was filled with participants calling for a church in the region to have a more "Asian face," arguing that the church has been wearing a foreign one for so long.[122] The formation of BECs is an attempt of making more local churches that are relevant and speak to the reality of the people who form part of the church. A big part of this is the focus on the everyday lives of the people.

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[121] Timoteo Butalid, "SCAPS CO Approach too Christian Community Building" in *Selected Readings on BCC-CO,* mimeographed document, undated, 5. in Mario Francisco, "A Sketch of Basic Church Communities," *Between Celebration and Critique: Snapshots from 500 Years of Philippine Christianity* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2021), 241.
[122] Claver*, The Making of a Local Church,* 13-14.

The everyday has been explored quite extensively in Latinx theology, and in *mujerista* theology in particular. In the work of Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz,[123] the everyday, or in Spanish, *lo cotidiano*, refers to "the immediate spaces of our lives, the first horizon in which we have our experiences that in turn are constitutive elements of our reality."[124] The horizon of mujerista theology has been the lived experience of women, particularly, the lived experiences "of the most oppressed women in our communities who struggle to survive and flourish constantly."[125] The everyday life at the grassroots, the struggle of the people to survive the everyday, the faith of the people interacting with their realities – these are the sources of reflection for *mujerista* theology. However, the focus on *lo cotidiano* goes beyond describing reality and making it a source for theological reflection. Isasi-Diaz develops her work being influenced by the liberation theologian Ignacio Ellacuria who establishes that reality is a key element in liberation theology. For Ellacuria, the theological method used in liberation theology is not only for describing or giving meaning to reality, but the objective is to engage this reality: not only to realize the weight of reality but to shoulder and take charge of the weight of reality.[126]

In the Filipino context, the theologian Daniel Pilario[127] describes what is included when the *lo cotidiano* is imagined in the local church. Commenting on the move towards everyday practices in theological reflection, he says,

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[123] Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz is a Cuban-American theologian and ethicist whose work pushed forward the field of Hispanic theology and in particular, Mujerista theology which is a theological reflection on the experiences of Latina women at the intersection of the struggles based on race and gender. Her reflections on *lo cotidiano* and *la lucha* are foundational works in Mujerista theology. Cf. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *En La Lucha = In the Struggle: Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

[124] Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, "Lo Cotidiano: A Key Element of Mujerista Theology," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 10/1 (August 2002): 8.

[125] Isasi-Diaz, 5.

[126] Ignacio Ellacuria, "Laying the Philosophical Foundations of Latin American Theological Method," no. 41-42. Translated by Kevin Burke from Ignacio Ellacuria, "Hacia una Fundamentación Filósofica del Método Teólogico Latinoamericano," in *Liberacion y Cautiverio: Debates en torno al metodo de la teologia en America Latina* (Mexico, 1975).

[127] Daniel Pilario is a Filipino theologian and a member of the Congregation of the Mission (Vincentians) in the Philippines. He has written extensively on liberation theology, Catholic Social Teachings, human rights, political-

> In this move, the daily struggle to survive but also to celebrate life itself becomes an experience of revelation. From the factory to the school, from the farms to the family kitchen, from picket lines to the parish church or village chapel – these are all privileged places of God's theophany. In the Philippine context, for instance, *lo cotidiano* also includes the common practices through which people directly express their faith: the family rosaries and the praying of the Angelus, processions and novenas, wakes and fiestas, candles and flowers, *Todos los Santos* and *Semana Santa*, prayer meetings and overnight vigils, religious songs and street dances. But *'la vida cotidiana'* also embrace, among others, non-religious practices: community meetings and grassroots mobilization, village dances and family reunions, demonstrations and protest actions, doing the ordinary household chores or sitting in the bus for hours being trapped in the daily traffic – simply, 'life!'[128]

The emphasis on the everyday has two important implications for how one does theology, and implications for the practice of synodality as well. First, there is a broadening of an understanding of revelation. "It is in daily life where revelation occurs," the *mujerista* theologian Maria Pilar Aquino argues, "We have no other place but *lo cotidiano* to welcome the living Word of God or to respond to it in faith. The faith of the people as lived and expressed in popular Catholicism happens within the dynamics of everyday existence."[129] If the everyday is revelatory, synodality must pay close attention to what it is revealing about the Word of God. The revelatory nature of the everyday broadens an understanding of revelation and creates a crucial foundation for the practice of communal discernment in the next sections. The practice of communal discernment hinges upon the revelatory nature of the everyday.

Second, the narratives of the poor and the oppressed are privileged. This opens up the theological horizon and includes matter that was not really a concern for theology before. In her own work with narratives as a source of ecclesiology, Natalia Imperatori-Lee argues that

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social theory. His work is deeply informed by his pastoral ministry with grassroots church communities in the Philippines. His monograph *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Method with Pierre Bordieu* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005) is his contribution to a theological method that engages praxis.

[128] Daniel Pilario, *Back to the Rough Grounds of Praxis: Exploring Theological Method with Pierre Bordieu* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 540.

[129] Maria Pilar Aquino cited in Natalia Imperatori-Lee, *Cuentame: Narratives in the Ecclesial Present* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 36.

"narratives can make space for the marginalized, including marginalized epistemologies, oral traditions, overlooked communities."[130] A theology of synodality demands a listening to these marginalized stories, especially those stories that have been left out of the discussion on matters of ecclesial life. Moreover, the focus on the everyday is not only what these stories are telling about the people who are part of that story – but careful attention must also be made to how those stories are being told by the people themselves, taking a closer look at how these people interact, understand, and relate with the world around them.

> What interests us about *lo cotidiano* and what we have been referring to is not a matter of just another perspective. *Lo cotidiano* indicates that the poor and the oppressed understand and face reality in a different way from that of the powerful and privileged. The epistemological function of *lo cotidiano* indicates that the struggles of the poor and the oppressed taking place in the underside of history constitutes the place, the moment – the horizon – of grassroots people's knowledge of reality.[131]

This discussion so far has been demonstrating the authority of the everyday. In his 2016 study on BECs in the Philippines twenty-five years after PCP II, the theologian and sociologist of religion Ferdinand Dagmang[132] mentions how an attention to what he calls "the authority of the everyday" is essential in how BECs flourish.[133] In relation of the reception of the vision of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines of a church for the poor,[134] the theologian

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[130] Imperatori-Lee, 23.
[131] Isasi-Diaz, 13.
[132] Ferdinand Dagmang is a Filipino theologian and sociologist of religion who writes extensively about ethics, popular religion, and culture. He wrote extensively on basic ecclesial communities in the Philippines. His book, *Basic Ecclesial Communities: An Evaluation of the Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) in Ten Parishes in the Philippines* (Munich: Missio Munich, 2016), documents the implementation of PCP II in basic ecclesial communities across the Philippines while his article, "From Vatican II to PCP II to BEC Too: Progressive Localization of a New State of Mind to a New State of Affairs," *MST Review* 18/2 (2016): 63-75, discusses the "creative appropriation" of Vatican II for church renewal in the Philippines.
[133] Ferdinand Dagmang, *Basic Ecclesial Communities: An Evaluation of the Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) in Ten Parishes in the Philippines* (Munich: Missio Munich, 2016), 43, 56.
[134] The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) is a landmark point in Philippine church history. This is a major event, similar to the CELAM Meeting in Medellin that attempted to receive the Second Vatican Council on the local level. The vision articulated in this council is a "church for the poor" that has been a central theme and aspiration in Philippine church ministry and theology. The official documents and proceedings of PCP II can be

Ferdinand Dagmang describes the authority of everyday life as "the conditions of the possibility that 'authorize' the dynamic reception and concrete realization of PCP II. For BEC formation, a good number of committed Christians and neighborly settings could provide those necessary conditions."[135] In other words, church communities can only be formed as well as communities (in general) can be formed – the geographical, social, cultural conditions make it possible to form community. Synodality relies upon pre-existing practices of community forming and the engagement with everyday life has to be done in interrogating and analyzing the theology of synodality that arises from the basic ecclesial communities.

B. The Everyday and the Sensus Fidei

Synodality, then, is a listening to the experiences of the people of God engaged in the everyday. Giving space for people to tell their stories and considering those stories seriously in decision-making and theological reflection are a recognition of their baptismal dignity, and a recognition of the revelatory nature of the everyday, as well. The interaction between God's theophany and the people of God discerning the divine in the everyday is seen in the dynamics of the "sense of faith," the *sensus fidei*. The sense of faith "narrates the church's story,"[136] which is a central task in ecclesiology, and an important feature in a theology of synodality that involves a more serious listening to the stories of the people about the everyday, and the discernment of the Spirit that puts Scripture, tradition, and the narratives of the everyday into dialogue.

The *sensus fidei* is a "sort of spiritual instinct that enables the believer to judge spontaneously whether a particular teaching or practice is or is not in conformity with the Gospel

found in Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Pasay: Paulines Publishing House, 1992).
[135] Dagmang, 57.
[136] Imperatori-Lee, 52.

and with apostolic faith."[137] At the communal level, the *sensus fidei* is the capability of the Christian community to discern the signs of the times. In this context, the role of the *sensus fidei* is essential in how communities discern: giving "an intuition as to the right way forward amid the uncertainties and ambiguities in history, and a capacity to listen discerningly to what human culture and the progress of the sciences are saying. It animates the life of faith and guides authentic Christian action."[138] These definitions of the sense of faith provided by the International Theological Commission's *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church* points to the essential role the *sensus fidei* provides in a theology of synodality. The vision of synodality is founded upon the capability of the Christian community to listen to one another and to discern the signs of the times.

The concept of the sense of faith finds its foundations in *Lumen Gentium* 12 which talks about the whole people of God's participation in the three offices of the church, but in particular, the church's prophetic office. The Council teaches that the whole people of God possess a "supernatural discernment in matters of faith" that is "aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth."[139] This has been cited by Pope Francis, forming the foundations for the synodal vision of his papacy. In *Evangelii Gaudium,* he highlights Vatican II's teaching on the *sensus fidei* of the people of God and their connection to the Spirit:

> In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The people of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo* [in believing]…. The Spirit guides [the people of God] in truth and leads it to salvation…. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression.[140]

[137] International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church* (2014): 49.
[138] International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church,* 70.
[139] Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), 12.
[140] Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 119.

Given this understanding of the people's participation with the Spirit, Francis understands the people of God not just as recipients of evangelization, but as active agents of the church's life and mission: "The people themselves are the subject."[141] The whole of the people of God, by virtue of their baptism, participates in the three offices of Christ: the prophetic or teaching office, the priestly or sanctifying office, and the kingly or governing office.[142] Furthermore, this recognition of the people's baptismal dignity also renews an understanding of theological authority in which the people themselves are witness to revelatory experiences in their daily lives that speak to how the Spirit guides the church today, hence invaluable in the listening and discernment in the church. In the ITC document, they remind their readers that "the experience of the Church shows that sometimes the truth of the faith has been conserved not by the efforts of theologians or the teaching of the majority of bishops but in the hearts of believers."[143] The synodal church, in Francis's vision, is a church that listens – "a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn…all listening to the Holy Spirit, the 'Spirit of truth,' in order to know what [the Spirit] 'says to the churches.'"[144] Looking at the *sensus fidei*, synodality is seen as a way of being church that listens to the Spirit in the experiences, narratives, and reflections of the people of God. Synodality presents a vision of church in which the people of God are capacitated by the Spirit to discern that which is of the gospel and a church that seeks the same Spirit unfolding in the realities in which the people find themselves.

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[141] Francis, *My Door is Always Open, Pope Francis with Antonio Spadaro* (London: Bloomsbury, *La Civilita Catttolica*, 2014), 49.
[142] Cf. Ormond Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid: The *Sensus Fidelium in a Synodal Church*," *Theological Studies* 78/2 (2017): 310. Take note of how Rush renames the three offices of Christ into the teaching office, sanctifying office, and the governing office which in my opinion expands the theological imagination on the three offices.
[143] International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church,* 119.
[144] Francis, "Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops" (17 October 2015), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html.

The engagement with reality is a central part of the synodal method of the BECs, affirming an understanding that is the linchpin of synodality – that the Spirit, revealed and discerned in the realities of the people, is guiding the church today. This synodal practice, as seen above, expresses a more robust theology of the *sensus fidelium* which is a core concept in a theology of synodality that pays attention to the workings of the Spirit in the people. Foregrounding the authority of the everyday in synodality asserts the revelatory nature of the everyday, and in particular, the everyday experiences of the poor and the oppressed. The focus on *lo cotidiano* from mujerista theology is an invitation not just to look at another perspective, but to engage with reality in the way that the people at the grassroots have known, shouldered, and transformed their own reality.[145] The invitation of the everyday, is a new way of knowing, a new way of being.

C. Discerning the Spirit in the Everyday

If everyday life is revelatory, as suggested above, how does a community discern what is being revealed in the framework of their faith? As the AsIPA model shows, the second step is theological reflection. With the everyday at the forefront, theological reflection becomes a dialogue between the everyday, Scripture, and tradition. This is in contrast with more hegemonic and colonial readings of Scripture in the past that have imposed colonial interpretations of Scripture to subjugate the people. The more contextual reading of Scripture is guided by the authority of the everyday: the community discerns the Spirit in a contextual reading of reality,

[145] The reference to knowing, shouldering, and transforming reality comes from the work of Ignacio Ellacuria, who in turn builds on the work of the Spanish philosopher Xavier Zubiri. Cf. Ignacio Ellacuria, "Hacia una Fundamentación Filósofica del Método Teólogico Latinoamericano," in *Liberacion y Cautiverio: Debates en torno al metodo de la teologia en America Latina* (Mexico, 1975), 609-635 and Kevine Burke, *The Ground Beneath the Cross: The Theology of Ignacio Ellacuria* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004).

the bible, and tradition. Theological reflection comes in the practice of biblical reflection. The bible is never read in a vacuum but is located in the everyday that becomes the locus for reflection: the everyday becomes an authoritative interpretative key and the BEC, a small hermeneutical community. In Claver's diocese, they use the practice of *lectio divina* along with the methodology of AsIPA: "This communal *lectio divina* is done in the theological reflection part where BECs try looking at the fruits of their situational analysis but are now doing so from the point of view of the gospel."[146] At the heart of synodality is a community reading Scripture together: discernment takes place "when the Word of God is made to cast light on the current problems of the community."[147] The Word of God is brought to life in the community's reflection and discussions. In turn, the Word of God brings to bear upon the transformation of their realities. "What is God, through Scripture, asking us to do about our situation today, about its problems and its opportunities? The answer people give to that question after discernment leads to planning what to do."[148] In the context of BECs, the theologian Amado Picardal describes the practice of bible-reflection for the formation of the community:

> The regular bible-reflection may be used as a means for on-going faith-life reflection of the community. It is also a means for continuing evangelization and catechesis. The members of the community come together regularly to reflect and share on the Word of God and on their situation. The bible-reflection should not become an intellectual or academic exercise. Instead of merely sharing their understanding of what the passage means, the participants should be encouraged to share their experiences, feelings, stories, and personal testimony based on the theme or reading.[149]

[146] Claver, 95.
[147] Claver, 95.
[148] Claver, 95.
[149] Amado Picardal, *Building Basic Ecclesial Communities* (Davao: Redemptorist Publication, 1999), 30-31. Amado Picardal is a Redemptorist priest, theologian, and human rights advocate. His book *Building Basic Ecclesial Communities* is a foundational text used in the study and practice of forming basic ecclesial communities in the Philippines.

Biblical reflection in grassroots communities gives an opportunity for readers to reconstruct the meaning of the text in light of their shared experiences, feelings, stories, and personal testimonies. Take for example, one of the BEC leaders in a small chapel in Payatas, a major landfill near Metro Manila. She participated in a focus group discussion on how members of the BEC experience Jesus in their daily lives and struggles. Luciminda Baldecimo shares her story of how she was saved from an accident in 2004:

> In 2004, my husband lost his job. He then joined me in scavenging. But one day, he got sick so I had to climb alone. I wanted to finish the work right away so that I could go home and take care of my sick husband. I happened to find a sack of "tinapa" (smoked fish). I was so happy. I told myself, the day's problem is solved for now. I immediately placed it inside my sack. While I was busy doing this, I did not notice a truck dumping its load right behind me. I was hit and was thrown off by its force. I lost consciousness. When I recovered a little, I saw another dump truck about to release its trash near me. I looked at the heavens and said: "Lord, is this the time? Are you going to take me now?" Then I just felt that someone held my shoulder and led me to a safe place at the sides. I looked up at the skies again and said: "Thank you, Lord." The man who helped me was Pio, our neighbor. But what I felt then was that it was Christ who helped me. Well, I felt it was the Lord who sent him to save me.[150]

The theologian Daniel Pilario asserts that in featuring and listening to the story of Luciminda, his purpose was to "listen to how ordinary people experience the story of Jesus in their lives….It is from these stories that our theology and pastoral praxis should start."[151] In the narratives of people which they usually share in the context of faith sharing and bible sharing, scripture and the experiences of people are in dialogue.

The way the bible is read together shows how the local church decolonizes biblical reflection. The method demonstrates contextual biblical hermeneutics done in the context of the Philippines, including the realities of a postcolonial church. As the biblical scholar Lily

[150] Daniel Pilario and Luciminda Baldecimo, "Jesus in PCP II, Jesus of the Margins," *The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCPII): Quo Vadis?* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2015), 29-30.
[151] Pilario and Baldecimo, 32.

Fetalsana-Apura argues in her work, the biblical text, in the hands of dominant powers, has been interpreted to systematically justify dominance, expansion, and the subjugation of lands and peoples.[152] Furthermore, even after dominant powers have left, dominance and hegemony still take a hold in the minds and hearts of a colonized people. "With deep regret," she says, "I embraced that worldview and have become proficient in the language and faith symbols of our colonizers at the cost of my own."[153] Instead of the hegemonic way of reading Scripture, biblical reflection in grassroots communities gives an opportunity for readers to reconstruct the meaning of the text in light of their shared experiences, feelings, stories, and personal testimonies.

Flesh-and-blood readers is what the biblical scholar Fernando Segovia calls the people reading the text – people who have their own concerns and struggles and bring them into their readings of Scripture.[154] Biblical reading in communal discernment brings these concerns to the fore and shape the hermeneutical frameworks in which people read the text together. In contrast to hegemonic models of reading Scripture, flesh-and-blood readers are invited to reimagine biblical texts as something that is life affirming for communities in the peripheries. Like how Fetalsana-Apura describes her struggle with how she has embraced the language and faith symbols of her colonizers, flesh-and-blood readers are invited in BECs to read the Scripture anew given their own lenses.

Speaking about the context of the church in the Philippines as a church experiencing poverty as a result of hundreds of years of colonial rule, the biblical scholar Barbara Bowe remarks that "The Bible, if it is to be received in this situation as the liberating word and

[152] Cf. Lily Fetalsana-Apura, *A Filipino Resistance Reading of Joshua 1:1-9* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019).
[153] Fetalsana-Apura, xii.
[154] Cf. Fernando Segovia, *Decolonizing Biblical Studies* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), 3. Segovia describes the readers of the text as positioned and socio-historically conditioned in contrast to an idea of the reader as impartial and objective.

revelation of God, cannot fail to address these concerns. For many Filipino Christians, therefore, a fierce commitment to the struggle for social transformation colors every reading of the biblical text."[155] Take for example, the *pasyon* that was discussed in the previous chapter. The Christ-story is reinterpreted in the context of the struggle of the Filipino people and their yearning for liberation. Or take the study of Benigno Beltran, *Christology of the Inarticulate,*[156] where he sheds light on the different ways people at the grassroots imagine and think of Christ in light of their own struggles – they read the Christ in the gospels as a Christ who is one with them in their own daily lives, in their own suffering.

Furthermore, biblical reflection is not only in dialogue with the world of poverty, which is also the socio-cultural world that the readers inhabit. This is also a socio-cultural exegesis, one that engages the culture and values of a people. Bowe has discussed at length the values in Filipino culture that color a Filipino reading of the bible – values in Filipino culture and society that resonate with the biblical world.[157] The socio-cultural exegesis she has demonstrated shows how the world of the text and the world in front of the text mutually enrich one another and show how reading the same text but in a different culture can shed light on a different side of a text that was not always evident in hegemonic readings. She argues,

> The revelatory power of the Word of God comes to us when we hear deep resonances of God's Word as it addresses us across the boundary of time and culture…. many of the Filipino Christians with whom I was privileged to live 'heard' the Word of God with an intuitive sense that I did not and could not possess. They taught me how to listen differently, and sharing their lives gave me the ability to hear differently the familiar texts that I had studied for so many years.[158]

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[155] Barbara Bowe, "Reading the Bible through Filipino Eyes," *Missiology: An International Review* 26/3 (1998): 347.
[156] Cf. Benigno Beltran, *Christology of the Inarticulate: An Inquiry into the Filipino Understanding of Jesus the Christ* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1987).
[157] Cf. Bowe, 345-360.
[158] Bowe, 356.

The bible as revelatory text is invaluable in communal discernment. In the interpretation of the text by the community, flesh-and-blood readers in BECs bring their lives and struggles in dialogue with the Word of God.

Underlying the dialogue between the everyday, the biblical text, and tradition is an understanding of authority and revelation. As the first section already argued, revelation is seen in the everyday – the intricacies of establishing this claim is made above as well. This section argues for the authority of the Scripture as revelatory text. What underlies this discussion is the interplay between the authority of the everyday and the authority of Scripture. In her discussion on the authority of the biblical text, the theologian Sandra Schneiders defines authority as the power to demand a response.[159] Compared to violence that forces another person's response, authority is a claim that imposes a kind of obligation to respond. Schneiders distinguishes two classes in the exercise of authority: a unilateral and absolute authority on one hand and a dialogical and relative authority on the other. The former coerces the other to assent to its claims as an absolute necessity, whereas the exercise of authority is ultimately coercive and violent.[160] Absolute authority depends on the threat of harm or loss in forcing people to respond, obey, and submit.[161] This kind of authority is often seen in state forces that are lethally armed – e.g., the dictatorial regime and the military power it forces upon people in the case above or from church leaders who threaten eternal damnation and claim absolute truth in colonial ways of being church. Those assenting to this kind of authority do so out of the need for survival amidst the threat of annihilation. On the other hand, relative and dialogical authority invites others into an investigation of its claims to see whether those warrant assent or not. The assent that comes in

[159] Cf. Sandra Schneiders, *Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture,* second edition (Collegeville, Liturgical Press, 1999), 55.
[160] Schneiders, 55.
[161] Schneiders, 55.

this kind of authority is not merely an intellectual assent, but also an affective and a moral one, an invitation into relationship – e.g., an invitation of a friend or the claim to compassion of a suffering person, or a kind of politics that listens and invites the people's participation. Schneiders describes what happens in a person's response to this authority: "To respond is to commit oneself, to be changed, to be initiated into a reality that one does not eventually dominate and control but in which one continues to participate at ever deeper levels."[162] Being drawn to the truth of its authority, those responding are changed by this new relationship.

Schneiders argues that Scripture has a dialogical and relative authority. The resonances that Bowe mentions about the revelatory power of the Word of God only resonates because the Scripture draws people into itself. What is being demonstrated in the BEC's interactions with Scripture in their communal discernment is this kind of authority. Without the threat of force or an imposition of just one interpretation of the sacred text, the people dialogue with the Scripture as they make meaning in the context of their everyday realities that are revelatory of the Spirit guiding their local church.

As for revelation, Schneiders claims that scripture *witnesses* to revelation, not in the sense of providing a record of past revelatory experiences a thousand years ago, but of a possibility of encountering revelation through the text in the present.[163] For Schneiders, "divine revelation must be seen as coextensive with human experience," and she affirms that all human experience is meant to be revelatory.[164] In her analysis of divine revelation, Schneiders places a privileged place for the Scripture as a revelatory text that witnesses to divine self-communication and speaks to human experience today. She holds that revelation is not merely a handing down

[162] Schneiders, 56-57.
[163] Schneiders, 46.
[164] Schneiders, 45.

of propositional knowledge, but it is a self-communication that is more interpersonal and offers divine self-giving to those who witness. The dialogue with the Sacred text and the everyday is a testament to both bearing witness to revelation.

The authority of the everyday permeates the communal discernment and theological reflection of the BECs. In contrast to hegemonic models of reading Scripture and decision-making, the community's theological imagination is engaged in their practice of integrating their everyday lives with the Word of God that resonates in their context. Their practice demonstrates a renewed understanding of authority and revelation in the church: Scripture is authoritative to a people who resonate with the Word and the people are also authoritative in their interpretations and meaning-making by virtue of their baptism and participation. Everyday life is revelatory and is put into dialogue with Scripture and tradition to discern where the Spirit can be heard and seen, where the Spirit arises in the conversations, and where the Spirit is leading and guiding the church.

D. Engaging the Everyday in Praxis

Finally, communal discernment is oriented towards praxis. Discernment does not end with reflection and analysis, but it continues with carrying out of the decision being made by the community members. This further shows how members of the BECs are not merely receivers but agents of evangelization. The attention towards the "authority of the everyday" discussed above shows that the realities of the people are valuable and serve as the locus for theological reflection on ecclesial life. Biblical reflection that is set in dialogue, discussed a few paragraphs above, shows how people are witnesses of revelation, and hearers of the Word. The praxis-oriented discernment emphasizes the agency of the people in ecclesial life, they are people who are agents

of the Spirit's transformation of the world. Listening to the Spirit through their communal reflection, the community acts upon what they have heard.

Discernment leads into decision-making and action around community concerns where people assign tasks to one another, knowing their capabilities and willingness to do so. A key concept behind this part of communal discernment is co-responsibility, which has been talked about as a key concept in the ecclesiologies of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and PCP II. In describing the church as a local community, the Third Plenary Assembly of the Asian bishops argues that a church that strives to "live and act under the constant guidance and power of the spirit" must have "genuine participation and co-responsibility" as "essential elements of its existence."[165] PCP II defines co-responsibility as a "shared responsibility in the mission of the entire Church."[166] The implications for this is not only the need to listen and consult the people in the context of decision-making, in the spirit of subsidiarity. But more importantly, it is involving the people in decision-taking, involving all the members in the church in roles, collective action, and agents in ministry. PCP II describes this movement as "an actual and active sharing of responsibilities among pope and bishops, clergy and religious, lay men and women. And if heavier emphasis is laid on the laity now, it is… to restore their neglected role of evangelizers, to enable them to exercise that role more fully and efficaciously for the spread of Christ's Kingdom."[167]

The action taken by the BEC in Kibawe mentioned above is one example of how co-responsibility takes place in a liberatory BEC. And many examples are seen throughout the

[165] Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, "The Church – A Community of Faith in Asia," no. 15 in *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991,* Gaudencio Rosales and C.G. Arevalo, eds. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), p. 60.
[166] Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines,* no. 100.
[167] Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees,* no. 100.

history of BECs in the Philippines. For example, the BECs who were members of the Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference in the 1960s and 1970s showed different ways of co-responsibility as an act of resistance against Martial Law – in different forms, both in active non-violent ways and otherwise.[168] Similarly, today a lot of BECs are demonstrating co-responsibility in involving the members of the BEC in livelihood programs, which they have discerned is a constructive response to the struggles of poverty that the community is facing. Dagmang's study of BECs in the Philippines shows how a number of BECs are focused on integrating livelihood programs as part of the BECs' ministries. Dagmang mentions the cases of the people he has encountered in the different parishes and BECs he visited: "the farmers of San Isidro Labrador, Pagadian; the fishers of Rosario, Cavite; the workers of POLA, and the interfaith forum participants."[169] The shift is seen in how all programs and projects are now being discerned by BEC members, leaders, and BEC councils at the base, instead of being monopolized by the parish center at the behest of the ordained clergy. The participation of the people makes a huge difference in the quality of parish life where BECs are not seen only as extensions of the parish but are active churches from the grassroots. Dagmang describes the participation of the BECs in ecclesial life as such:

> Every BEC unit does not only depend on the participation of individuals in liturgical functions but more importantly in their devotion to the mission of bringing to life Jesus' message of the Reign of God whose privileged agents and beneficiaries are the poor. This would mean bringing to life the Reign of God in various everyday lifeworld ways.[170]

As the community discerns how they are to be church in the midst of the realities of their community, integral evangelization looks different based on what the people are experiencing. It

[168] For a comprehensive documentation of what happened in this pastoral conference, see Walter Kinne, *A People's Church: The Mindanao-Sulu Church Debacle* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990).
[169] Dagmang, xxxii.
[170] Dagmang, xxxii.

is also important to mention here that in the different community organizing developments throughout the Philippines, there are different kinds of BECs with different stages of growth.[171] The modality in which the community exists and the trajectory upon which the BEC is called to grow are determined through the communal discernment of the Spirit leading the church at the current moment.

As seen in the practice of communal discernment, synodality is a theology of encounter, dialogue, participation, and co-responsibility. First, it is a way of being church that is rooted in the realities of the people. The daily life of the members of the BEC are not only listened to in communal discernment but become the locus for theological reflection. There is an intentionality that comes with communal discernment in how it prioritizes the stories and realities of the people. Synodality is intentional in listening to and prioritizing human experiences in theological reflection – a venue wherein dialogue, participation, and co-responsibility is made possible. Second, biblical reflection is central to communal discernment, and in synodality. The Word of God is revealed in both Scripture and the realities of the people. Putting those in dialogue with one another shows a contextual biblical reflection that puts Scripture in dialogue with culture and the world of poverty. Finally, communal discernment does not end with decision-making, but also with decision-taking. The people involved all throughout the process of discernment are invited to carry out the action being decided by the community in the ways they are capable. This is an owning of the lay person's identity as an agent of evangelization, a demonstration of

[171] The different levels and kinds of BECs have been described extensively in different texts. Dagmang's study shows how BECs grow depending on the larger socio-cultural setting such as whether the BEC is located in an urban or a rural setting, with BECs in the rural setting growing in a more robust way. Amado Picardal's *Building Basic Ecclesial Communities* lays down a strategic framework for building BECs from liturgical communities towards ministerial/service communities, towards liberative BECs. Karl Gaspar's article "Localization Resisting Globalization: Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) in the Postmodern Era," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 38 (2001): 316-350, describes the growth and decline of BECs from the martial law era to the implementation and reception of PCP II nationwide, the BECs being included as a national pastoral priority.

participation and co-responsibility in action. This is also a way of seeing a synodality that is oriented towards social action and the transformation of the larger society.

II. Listening to the Spirit as a Decolonial Practice

At the heart of synodality is the Spirit. As seen in the synodal practices of the BECs above, the Spirit animates the church – it is the Spirit that the church listens to in their communal discernment, it is the Spirit that invites the church into mission, it is the Spirit that the church encounters in the everyday. Synodality rests on the conviction that the Spirit is still guiding the church today.[172] In listening to the Spirit, synodality then presents opportunities to reimagine what the church could be and provides important theological foundations for learning with one another.

I argue that listening to the Spirit and the practice of conversations in the Spirit are decolonial practices in how these tap into local knowledges and transform power relations in church culture and structures. Engaging local knowledges and theologies is a way to recognize the authority of the everyday, the experiences of ordinary people in which the Spirit resounds in many different modes and faces. Transforming power relations in church structures is also an invitation from the Spirit to reform the church and renew the face of the earth. This section will further look into the dynamic that the church has with the Spirit and the possibilities that this relationship can bring. From the experiences of the BECs discussed above to the current practices of the Synod on Synodality that I introduce here, the church has been in touch with the Spirit which is a development that has been fostered by the church more intentionally since Vatican II. This section starts by discussing the current conversations in the Spirit as a reception

[172] Jos Moons, "Synodality, the Holy Spirit, and Discernment of Spirits" in *The Synodal Pathway: When Rhetoric Meets Reality,* Eamonn Conway, Eugene Duffy, and Mary McDaid, eds. (Dublin: Columba Books, 2022), 83.

of Vatican II's understanding of church which I describe as a people of God listening to the Spirit together. The section then argues that listening to the Spirit is a decolonial practice which pushes our understanding of the Spirit even further with different decolonial pneumatologies. Finally, the section concludes by discussing how synodality is a continual practice of a church constantly being born, constantly decolonizing itself from the shackles of a colonial church and into a church of the Spirit.

A. Conversations in the Spirit as a Reception of Vatican II

The experiences of basic ecclesial communities discussed above demonstrate a dynamic reception of the ecclesiologies of Vatican II.[173] These communities bear witness to an understanding of church as a people of God listening to the Spirit in the everyday – central pillars of Vatican II's vision of church reform. From a clerical and hierarchical church, BECs have demonstrated a more diffused notion of authority in church by listening to the people. From a colonial way of being church that rigidly divides who can teach and learn, BECs made a decolonial turn by presenting the possibility of people learning with one another. From an inward-looking church, BECs have become a more missionary church of the poor, a church of dialogue, participation, and co-responsibility.

In his papacy, Francis has started a new phase of the reception of Vatican II, in a more intentional way that engages the whole church into discernment. As Rafael Luciani observes,

[173] Reception is a concept in theology that refers to how a teaching or practice is accepted, adapted, or even rejected by a local church community. Peter Phan describes reception well as "the ongoing process by which the community of faith, with its *sensus fidei/fidelium*, makes a teaching or a practice of the faith its own, acknowledging thereby that it is a true and authentic expression of the church's faith…. it is an act whereby the community affirms and attests that such teaching or practice really contributes to the building up of the community's understanding and life of faith." In Peter Phan, "Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II in Asia," *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 303. Cf. Yves Congar, "Reception as an Ecclesiological Reality" in *Election and Consensus in the Church*, Giuseppe Alberigo and Anton Weiler, eds. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 43-68.

"Francis has begun to promote a creative reception of the Council. More than reforming church structures, Francis has tried to convert mentalities and redirect the institutional ways of proceeding toward a model of Church that is more missionary and synodal."[174] Francis shows this by holding different synods on multiple matters that attempt to be more consultative and participatory in their approach. The biggest effort by Francis, however, is the Synod on Synodality that involves a three-year long process of listening to the people. Started in 2021, the synod has three stages: the local/national stage, the continental stage, and the universal stage. The aim of the process is not merely to come up with documents in the end, like most other church assemblies, but it is meant to be a discernment process where the entire church "discerns together how to move forward on the path towards being a more synodal Church in the long-term."[175] The synodality that is being discerned here is not only the form of church structures and assemblies – but synodality in the sense of it being the modus operandi et vivendi of the church. In other words, the synod invites a rethinking of what it means to be church that involves all its members in a more participatory, discerning, and missionary way.

In the Synod on Synodality, the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the "universal phase" of the synod highlights the practice of conversations in the Spirit – a practice that embodies the synodal method in a more concrete way. In these conversations, participants are moved to listen to each other and to the Spirit that is at work in all voices. The synod described this conversation as "an opportunity to experience being Church and to move from listening to our brothers and sisters in Christ to listening to the Spirit, who is the authentic protagonist, and being sent forth in mission

[174] Rafael Luciani, "'Querida Amazonia': The Beginning of a 'Creative New Reception' of the Synodal Path," conference paper presented at Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano y Caribeño, 1.
[175] General Secretariat of the Synod, "The Synod on Synodality," *Synod 2021-2024* (2021), https://www.synod.va/en/the-synod-on-synodality/what-is-the-synod-about.html.

by Him."[176] The conversation takes the mode of "shared prayer with a view to communal discernment."[177] Before the conversation begins, participants prepare themselves through personal reflection and meditation upon a topic that was chosen for the conversation, "praying for the gift of a meditated word nourished by prayer, not an opinion improvised on the spot."[178] Each person then speaks from their experience, everyone listens not only to each other but also listens deeply and carefully to the voice of the Spirit heard within the voices and the interior movements of the community gathered. The objective of this practice is not a mere understanding of each other and the key points that were shared in the circle, but to "build a consensus of the fruits of the joint work,"[179] and move together into mission according to how the Spirit calls them to act. Three movements mark this practice: listening to each other (and having each person speak), making space for others and the Spirit, and walking together.[180]

Part of this practice concerns making decisions based on the promptings of the Spirit. A challenge in this approach is determine what is of the Spirit and what is not in the discernment. As Jos Moons points out, "synodality can be thought of as a form of communal discernment: discerning together by means of conversation, prayer and growing clarity about *what is of God and what is not.*"[181] What Ignatian spirituality calls "the bad spirit" can also be present at synodal conversations "to discourage and to prevent moving forward."[182] In this context, Moons explains

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[176] Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris for the First Session (October 2023)*, no 34. https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/common/phases/universal-stage/il/ENG_INSTRUMENTUM-LABORIS.pdf. Henceforth to be referred to as *Instrumentum Laboris* with paragraph number.
[177] *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 37.
[178] *Instrumentum Laboris,* no. 37.
[179] *Instrumentum Laboris*, no. 39.
[180] *Instrumentum Laboris*, nos. 37-40.
[181] Jos Moons, "The Holy Spirit as the Protagonist of the Synod: Pope Francis's Creative Reception of the Second Vatican Council," *Theological Studies* 84/1 (2023): 66, emphasis mine.
[182] Moons, "The Holy Spirit as the Protagonist of the Synod," 66. He also cites Francis being aware of the "bad spirit" in synodal spaces: "Wherever the Spirit of God is present, so, too, are temptations to silence it or distract from it. (If the Spirit weren't present, those forces wouldn't bother.) We saw the bad spirit in some of the 'noise' outside the synod hall, as well as within it." in Austen Ivereigh, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future, Pope Francis in Conversation with Austen Ivereigh* (London: Simon Schuster, 2020), 85.

that the Holy Spirit, the "Good Spirit" acts in two ways. First, the Spirit exposes and "unmasks agendas and hidden ideologies."[183] And second, the Spirit creates "a breakthrough in the communal discernment" which Francis describes as "an overflowing fountain, the answers [poured] that formerly the contraposition didn't let us see."[184] These actions of the Spirit can and should be discerned in conversations in the Spirit. The task of the community gathered, but especially the facilitator of the conversation, is to discern the motions of the Spirit, which is what the moments of silence during synodal sessions are for.[185] As a spiritual director pays attention to the movements of the Spirit – of consolation and desolation – in individual spiritual direction, the community also pays attention to the consolations or desolations of the group as they discern the motions of the Spirit. This helps the group move forward, form consensus, and make decisions for their work moving forward.

The pneumatological foundations of synodality are seen in the practice of conversations in the Spirit, with each movement demonstrating key aspects of a synodal theology. The first movement shows a people listening to the Spirit in the everyday that is authoritative and revelatory of the Spirit. The experiences of the people are foregrounded, acknowledging the centrality of the everyday, how these experiences are revelatory, and how people of faith can hear the Spirit resound in those experiences. The second movement urges people to listen to each other and listen deeply to the Spirit present in the assembly, the "voice" of the Spirit "speaking" through the voices of the people. The third movement identifies key points for the joint work moving forward – a following of the Spirit who guides the church today.

[183] Moons, "The Holy Spirit as the Protagonist of the Synod," 66-67; cf. Ivereigh, 86 and 91.
[184] Moons, "The Holy Spirit as the Protagonist of the Synod," 67; cf. Ivereigh, 80-83.
[185] Moons, "The Holy Spirit as the Protagonist of the Synod," 66.

B. Decolonial and Bold Pneumatologies

Listening to the Spirit opens up the church to decolonial practice. As seen above, the synodal practice is a way to engage local knowledges and theologies of grassroots church communities as well as transform power relations and understandings of authority in ecclesial life. Furthermore, listening to the Spirit opens different pathways towards an understanding of where and how the Spirit has already been heard by subaltern communities. The focal point of the discussion of this practice in this chapter is the relationship between the Spirit and the church community that discerns together – the relationship that arises in everyday life, the relationship of a people listening to their God guiding their community today, the relationship where the Spirit arises from meaning-making practices done together. Listening to the Spirit is a central practice in synodality and it begs a deeper look. For the decolonial theologians I highlight below, the question that they ask in this regard is not merely "What or who is the Spirit being listened to?" but rather "Where has the Spirit been heard?" and "How has the Spirit accompanied subaltern communities?" How has the Spirit renewed the face of the earth?

The Spirit can be heard in indigenous religious beliefs and practices. As the Second Vatican Council declares in *Nostra Aetate,* the church "rejects nothing that is true and holy" in different religions and regards "with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men."[186] This includes indigenous religious beliefs and practices that have long held a tradition of interacting with

[186] Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* Nostra Aetate, (28 October 1965), no. 2. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

spirits and the Spirit.[187] The invitation for Christians, as Jojo Fung beckons, is to be "able to come to an appreciation of these spirits where they discern correlations with the workings of the Spirit of Christ."[188] These correlations are useful in discussing the pneumatology behind Francis's notion of synodality in this chapter.

Indigenous communities abound in local pneumatologies that paint a picture of how subaltern communities have encountered the Spirit in their own contexts, cultures, and lands. Decolonial theologians such as Oscar Garcia-Johnson and Jojo Fung reflect on these indigenous spiritualities in their attempt to see how grassroots communities have encountered God in the midst of colonization and the silencing of peoples across the world. Fung, for example, puts shamanic pneumatologies from Asia in dialogue with Christian theology and argues that "the shamanic pneumatology provides the necessary discursive space for the subaltern voices of marginal communities and especially women to be heard in the perennial struggle against the neocolonial, statist, and global hegemonic powers."[189] The way that people have encountered God before and in resistance to hegemonic theological frames shows a more expansive vision of who the Spirit is and how the Spirit has accompanied subaltern communities. Decolonial pneumatology, for Garcia-Johnson is

> an attempt to pave the way for a different discourse, situated at the border of predominant paradigms and disciplines related to the Spirit and oriented toward decolonial healing…. Decolonial (border) pneumatology is about border people of

[187] The relationship between spirit and Spirit is seen in many configurations. See Yangkahao Vashum, "Jesus Christ as the Ancestor and Elder Brother: Constructing a Relevant Indigenous/Tribal Christology of North East India," *Journal of Tribal Studies* 13, no. 2 (July-December 2008): 27. Vashum discusses the role of spirits as mediators between God and the world, noting that "God relates to the people and the world through the spirits." For additional perspectives on indigenous pneumatology, see Jojo Fung, "What Christians Can Learn from Shamanic Pneumatology," in *Interfaith Dialogue: Global Perspectives*, ed. Edmund Chia (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 122. Fung's article provides various accounts of indigenous pneumatology from different Asian communities.
[188] Fung, 122
[189] Jojo Fung, "What Christians Can Learn from Shamanic Pneumatology" in Edmund Chia, ed., *Interfaith Dialogue: Global Perspectives* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 119. Fung is a Jesuit who teaches theology at the Ateneo de Manila University and the East Asian Pastoral Institute. He writes extensively on spirituality, especially on shamanic pneumatology. His book, *A Shamanic Pneumatology In A Mystical Age of Sacred Sustainability* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), delves into the topic more extensively.

> faith engaged with and enabled by the Spirit Outside the Gate at the border of life and death, oppression and justice, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, poverty and affluence, the West and the non-West, the Uncreated Invisible and the created visible, hopelessness and utopia.[190]

Paving the way for a different discourse, decolonial pneumatology listens to the Spirit from all places – suspends and resists hegemonic interpretations of who the Spirit is to allow different perspectives to enter. In acknowledging how indigenous peoples have named and identified the Spirit in their indigenous beliefs, decolonial theologians commit "an act of solidarity with the indigenous communities worldwide, particularly in their movement of prophetic resistance against the colonial and neocolonial imperial missionary Christianity"[191] that does not often deem these beliefs as theologically valid. The Spirit has been known in different ways by different peoples in the Global South. "The Great Spirit," take for example the perspective of the Karenites in India, "is experienced in everyday village life, in their ancestral forestland or homeland."[192] The Spirit is understood relationally with the life of the people and is "the power that sustains the wisdom of the peoples and the various fields of local knowledge; their cosmologies and knowledge related to the types of forests, rice and land use, rituals, seeds, soil, taboos, water and rotational farming, and the months in the cycle of rice production."[193] Another example Native Americans whose spirituality has been described by Garcia-Johnson as a "praxis of spirituality rooted in creation aimed at giving Life to the people" where "the Spirit Outside the Gate has been present in the land and communities of Original Americans" in the Spirit's many names across the continent.[194] God relates to the people through spirits and the Spirit. Indigenous

[190] Oscar Garcia-Johnson, *Spirit Outside the Gate: Decolonial Pneumatologies* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 217. Garcia-Johnson is a professor of theology and Latinx studies whose theological works are approached through a hermeneutic called "transoccidentality." His book cited above delves deeper into this framework.
[191] Fung, 122.
[192] Fung, 122.
[193] Fung, 123.
[194] Garcia-Johnson, 9 and 11.

peoples, spiritual in their own right, have been in touch with these spirits and have been listening to the Spirit in their indigenous beliefs and theologies.

The Spirit also enables communities to decolonize and heal the wounds imparted by a colonial and hegemonic church that has silenced the voices of grassroots church communities. Looking at immigrant Latina spiritualities, Garcia-Johnson sees the Spirit accompanying immigrants as a "decolonial healer of the Latina woman" who are suppressed by "patriarchal, racist, ecclesial structures, " the Spirit is seen as "the wild child of the Trinity who saves, heals, affirms, calls, empowers, and transforms persons and communities."[195] In order to do this, the Spirit imparts gifts or charisms that enable the community to move towards healing. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier explains that these charisms are "a spiritual inheritance that we receive as children of God," giving an example of the prophecy and the gift of tongues wherein she "taps into the rivers of the Spirit flowing within us even when these seem to go underground because we are depressed or oppressed. She brings us back our voice. She summons us to word and creative work."[196] The Spirit's enabling of communities demonstrates how the Spirit works in creation in various contexts. In the Spirit imparting charisms that lead to decolonial healing, the Spirit continues the incarnational work and mission of Christ in the various contexts of different grassroots church communities throughout the world.

The examples above are ways in which subaltern communities have already listened to the Spirit and have been moved by the Spirit into praxis and mission. I do not aim to provide an exhaustive account here of how the Spirit has been heard by different grassroots communities. My desire in this section is to show how in listening to the Spirit in synodal practice, a multitude

[195] Garcia-Johnson, 39.
[196] Loida I. Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Perez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangelicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 23.

of perspectives arises and there is an opportunity to encounter the Spirit in an ever-expanding and decolonial way. Synodality offers a possibility of listening to and being guided by the Spirit in the everyday where the Spirit abides. In de-centering usual understandings of the Spirit, the church is invited into a deeper listening, a bold pneumatology that listens to the Spirit in new ways, including ways that are not usually seen as normative within Catholic theologies.

There are resonances between the decolonial pneumatologies above and Francis' own pneumatology that the theologian Jos Moons dubs as a "bold pneumatology" where the Spirit is seen as having an active role in the church.[197] For Francis, synodality has always been a matter of the Spirit, naming the Spirit as "always the great 'protagonist' of the Church's life."[198] In his bold pneumatology, Francis highlights the Spirit's agency and central role in matters of the church. In one essay, Moons examines Francis' pneumatological convictions in his addresses and writings in which the pope ascribes different roles and actions to the Spirit. The most frequent is the Spirit speaking that coincides with the call to listen.[199] Another is the Spirit directing or guiding the church wherein the pope usually exhorts the faithful to "journey together,"[200] to "move forward together" in the Synod which he describes as a grace-filled event, a process of healing guided by the Spirit.[201]

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[197] Moons, "The Holy Spirit as the Protagonist of the Synod: Pope Francis's Creative Reception," 67. Moons discusses this pneumatology in the context of a *Geistvergessenheit* – a forgetfulness of the Spirit or a downplaying of the role of the Spirit in favor of more Christological ecclesiologies. Moons is a Jesuit theologian who writes about pneumatology, synodality, and Vatican II. The article cited here is one of his most updated and extensive take on the matter.

[198] Cf. Moons, "The Holy Spirit as the Protagonist of the Synod," 62; Francis, "Address to the Faithful of the Diocese of Rome" (September 18, 2021), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/september/documents/20210918- fedeli-diocesiroma.html.

[199] Cf. Moons, "The Holy Spirit as the Protagonist of the Synod," 64.

[200] Francis, "Address to the Faithful of the Diocese of Rome," (18 September 2021), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/september/documents/20210918-fedeli-diocesiroma.html.

[201] Francis, "Address for the Opening of the Synod," (9 October 2021), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/october/documents/20211009-apertura-camminosinodale.html.

Moons claims that these are not just some "pious abstractions" but a development in the reception of the ecclesiology of Vatican II, especially *Lumen Gentium*.[202] In his practice of synodality, Francis sees the Spirit at the center of ecclesial life. For him, the Spirit speaks to and through the church, through the *sensus fidei* which is "the privileged means through which the Spirit whispers divine guidance to the church regarding the meaning of the Gospel in an increasingly complex world."[203] Listening to this Spirit, the church is guided and becomes a church open to the promptings of the Spirit who "suggests fresh paths and new ways of speaking [and being.]"[204]

The pneumatological convictions that have been described in this section hold implications for a synodal ecclesiology and pedagogy that will be discussed in the next sections. The pneumatologies presented above show new openings for an understanding of the Spirit and how the Spirit has accompanied the church, especially subaltern communities. In synodality's listening to the Spirit, the possibilities open for the new to come – new ways of being church, new non-hegemonic ways of understanding how the Spirit is speaking and guiding the church today, new ways of understanding how God interacts and relates with God's people.

[202] Cf. Jos Moons discusses Francis's reception of *Lumen Gentium* in-depth in his article, "The Holy Spirit as the Protagonist of the Synod: Pope Francis's Creative Reception of the Second Vatican Council," *Theological Studies* 84/1 (2023): 61-78. He argues that *Lumen Gentium* has a more robust Christological bent when it comes to its ecclesiology than a pneumatological one. While the Council mentions the Spirit here and there, Francis leans into the role and agency of the Spirit arising from the document's theology.
[203] Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid," 57.
[204] Francis, "Address for the Opening of the Synod."

C. Synodality and a Church Walking Together

The practice of synodality today engages the church in decolonizing itself, a church continuously born. The church is seen in synodality not only as a people of God, but a pilgrim people of God. Nathalie Becquart describes the vision of synodality as a church

> in a state of permanent birth, in an on-going process of reform. It lets us perceive that the identity of the Church is a dynamic identity, not a static one; it is a relational identity of communion-mission rooted in the Trinitarian mystery and the Eucharistic mystery. This identity of the Church manifested through the concept of synodality tells us that it is a Church in movement, a Church in emergence.[205]

Born from the communal discernment of synodality, the church is now always invited to reimagine ecclesial life in the movements of the Spirit and upon reflection of the Word in their ever-changing realities. The church, then, is always in a constant state of ecclesiogenesis. The term, introduced by the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff in his book of the same name, refers to a "new way of being church." I began this discussion on synodality claiming that it is not really a "new" invention of the current papacy, but a retrieval of being church that has been seen since the early church. However, "newness" as an ecclesiological concept is an understanding precisely of a church that is in movement not only in reimagining itself in the context of an ever-changing world, but a church that is in movement towards new ministries and into mission in the world, towards an eschatological horizon. It is a church that is creatively faithful to the same gospel and adapts to the changing times, being an effective sacrament of God in the world.

Guided by the Spirit, the church is a pilgrim people of God who discern their way together. As Moons argues,

> Historically, therefore, the church is an eschatological reality: she is a pilgrim people on a journey, constantly trying to reflect Christ's light and to be led by the Spirit. In more concrete terms, that involves conversion, reform, and discerning the signs of

[205] Nathalie Becquart, "Synodality: Toward a Renewal of Ministry: Responding to Clericalism and the Call for Sharing Ministry in the Church" in *The Synodal Pathway: When Rhetoric Meets Reality,* Eamonn Conway et al. eds. (Dublin: Columba Books, 2022), 72.

> the times. Synodality is a means to bring alive the theoretical idea of a pilgrim church.[206]

The Spirit animates the people into mission, into renewing the face of the earth. The Spirit as the one guiding and leading the church today, is also the primary agent of liberation that animates the people into mission and of building the Reign of God that liberates all. Synodality cannot be separated from mission. And discernment cannot end with endless discussions about what God is calling the church to be or do. Synodality has to follow through with action and the participation of all members of the church in mission. Co-responsibility is a central idea in a synodal church that is always on mission, always emergent. The participation of the people of God, as a pilgrim people, does not end in listening or consulting them, but engaging the people in the decision-taking as active agents in ministry. The vision of church from the experiences of the BECs is resonant here – a church of the poor that does not only minister to the poor but involves the poor and everyone as active agents of evangelization: "to restore their neglected role of evangelizers, to enable them to exercise that role more fully and efficaciously for the spread of Christ's Kingdom."[207] The Spirit-led church that is being envisioned by synodality is one that is animated by the Spirit as agents of that Spirit in renewing the face of the earth.

III. Conclusion: Synodal Foundations for Learning with One Another

After looking at the synodal practice of communal discernment from basic ecclesial communities in the Philippines, and after looking at the practice of conversation in the Spirit from the recent documents from the synod on synodality, this chapter has established theological foundations for learning with one another.

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[206] Jos Moons, "Synodality, the Holy Spirit, and Discernment of Spirits" in *The Synodal Pathway: When Rhetoric Meets Reality,* Eamonn Conway et al. eds. (Dublin: Columba Books, 2022), 83.
[207] Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees,* no. 100.

The first and most crucial foundation is the authority of the everyday. In the practice of BECs, they foreground the daily lives of the people in communal discernment. This affirms the revelatory nature of the everyday and the privileging of minoritized narratives in church life. In the conversations in the Spirit, the first step is listening to everyone's stories and reflections. The authority of the everyday is central in synodality, serving not only as a locus for communal discernment and theological reflection, but it invites a new way of being, a new way of engagement. What synodality does is not only foreground the everyday as revelatory, but it also affirms the agency and the authority of the people. This is why the turn to the everyday is valuable, and I suggest it is a necessary decolonial turn in the church. This is a crucial foundation for this dissertation. The question posed at the start of who gets to learn and teach, whose experiences and voices matter are answered by synodality in its affirmation of the authority of the everyday. This affirmation provides a theological foundation for learning with one another in the context of grassroots church communities. The authority of the everyday affirms that all can learn with one another in their engagement with their reality.

The second foundation is the listening to the Spirit in the voices and in the dialogue among the everyday, Scripture, and tradition. In the practices of the BECs, communal discernment centers upon the reading of the bible and in how they ask themselves through that lens what they are to do about the situation that they are facing as a community. In the conversations in the Spirit, everyone is invited to listen to the voice within the voices that they have heard – to listen to the Spirit speaking, guiding the church gathered in synodal practice. This is a way of doing theology and of reading Scripture in the context of the people, in the context of the everyday. The relative authority of the everyday is put into conversation with the other sources of faith that the community holds dear. In this dialogue, the community surfaces

what the Spirit is trying to tell them and they are guided accordingly. At the core of synodality is listening to the Spirit, and in doing so, it presents a modality of deep learning that listens deeply: to one another, to themselves, and to the Spirit resounding in the process. This will be developed further in the chapter on participatory action research that speaks about the "third voice." The discernment happening in synodality is a discernment of the Spirit.

Finally, the third foundation is an engagement with the everyday in praxis. The communal discernment of BECs does not end with reflection but continues in action and mission – as seen in how the different BECs have engaged with their realities in different ways after their discernment. In the conversations in the Spirit, the faithfulness to the process continues in the taking up of responsibility and of forming a church that has been discerned from the synodal process. This foundation demonstrates a learning that engages reality and embodies that which they have learned from the Spirit and from each other thus far. The modality of learning here is one that invites learners into participation, into action as they engage the everyday and become agents of the transformation of their own realities.

The practical theology of synodality presented here lays the foundations for a synodal pedagogy developed further with critical pedagogy in the later chapters of this dissertation. These foundations make it possible for people to learn with one another, an image of church that listens to the Spirit dwelling and working in the people of God. This pedagogy listens to the people's wisdom in which the Spirit can be found. Furthermore, this is a religious education that animates the people into mission and transformation, being beckoned by the Spirit to social transformation. In the school of synodality, the people of God learn with one another in communal listening and biblical reflection while being moved into mission and social transformation.

CHAPTER THREE

CREATING SPACE:

CRITICAL PEDAGOGY AND LEARNING NEW WAYS OF BEING TOGETHER

While the previous chapter has laid down the theological foundations, this chapter examines the educational foundations for learning with one another. The framework of synodality in the previous chapter demonstrates a reimagining of theological authority with the dynamics of communal discernment: members of the church community listening to one another and the Spirit moving them into action. Critical pedagogy, on the other hand, reimagines the work of education as a practice of freedom[208] that provides tools to unsettle the normative,[209] problematize realities,[210] theorize matters of agency,[211] and engage all learners in the challenges and demands of democracy in an increasingly authoritarian public square.[212]

While critical pedagogical models flourished in the socio-politically turbulent time of the 1960s and 70s within anti-colonial revolutions and civil rights and liberation movements against dictatorships, the principles of these models continue to be relevant in the authoritarian and polarized societies of today. I argue that critical pedagogy is helpful in informing how grassroots church communities can educate today because of how it centers the voices of the marginalized, works towards social and environmental transformation, and engages learners into critical

[208] bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 13.
[209] Henry Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*, (New York: Continuum, 2011), 3. He describes critical pedagogy in a nutshell: "It also provides tools to unsettle commonsense assumptions, theorize matters of self and social agency, and engage the ever-changing demands and promises of a democratic polity."
[210] Cf. Paulo Freire discusses this at length in the third chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000).
[211] Giroux, 3.
[212] Giroux, 3.

dialogue. Critical pedagogy, as I construe it in this chapter, reimagines education as a practice of space-making. Learning is not only a discursive practice that transforms social space, but it is moreover a physical practice that engages people with their material realities. The spaces transformed by critical pedagogy are co-constructed with the whole community who learns through dialogue.

Space is a key concept in this chapter. Along with the spatial turn in educational theory, I understand space as a relational notion, and education as involved in the production of space. "A relational notion of space," the educational theorists Marianne Larsen and Jason Beech argue, "implies understanding that space not only exists in substantial, concrete, and separate forms, but as sets of relations between individuals and groups."[213] These relations may refer to the relationship between people with one another in social settings including power relations in those settings, on the one hand, i.e., social space, and the net of relationships among material things and beings on the other, i.e., material space. Education, and critical pedagogy in particular, pays close attention to the spaces all inhabit and how these relationships affect the living and the meaning-making of all involved. Furthermore, critical pedagogy emphasizes the productive function of space – the notion of *creating space* in the practice of critical pedagogy. One conviction of educational theorists is that "space is socially produced" and that space has an essential role in the process of becoming, not only for individual learners or the community, but for the becoming of all multiple living systems. In the notion of space-making in critical pedagogy, the practices of space-making involve the transformation of the social space in terms of the critique of the power relations that hinder groups of people to flourish. It also involves the transformation of physical space and a dialectical engagement between humans and their

[213] Marianne Larsen and Jason Beech, "Spatial Theorizing in Comparative and International Educational Research," *Comparative Education Review* 58/2 (2014), 199.

relationships with non-human beings and material realities—that is, relationships within and among all living systems.

This chapter looks into the aspects of critical pedagogy mentioned above, with each aspect creating space for all to learn with one another. The first section argues that critical pedagogy is a decolonial practice in how it fosters critical awareness of hegemonic epistemologies while centering marginalized and subaltern voices in learning and teaching. As a decolonial practice, critical pedagogy creates the space for different ways of knowing and being to reemerge and thrive from the people acknowledging their authority as meaning-makers and knowledge producers. The second section argues that critical pedagogy is a material-discursive practice in how it transforms not only human culture, but also the material world. Critical pedagogy is an embodied way of learning which places the body in the midst of other learning bodies. As a material-discursive practice, critical pedagogy engages humans with the transformation of material space, as well as being transformed through learning from the earth. Informed by these two aspects of critical pedagogy, the chapter concludes by imagining critical pedagogy as a dialogical practice that creates space for dialogue to happen and for the new to emerge from this dialogue of diversities.

I. Dismantling Old Houses: Critical Pedagogy as Decolonial Practice

We live in our old master's houses. The Filipino theologian Eleazar Fernandez once described the situation of theological education in the Philippines as follows: "Western theological formulations have long served as the house of authority for third-world formulations, stifling our theological creativity and continuing to become instruments of Western control and domination

now."[214] This is true not only in the formal, institutional sense of theological education, but even more so in the way people and grassroots communities think and imagine their faith. The ways religious education and decision-making are done in faith communities are bound by these theological formulations that restrict and silence voices and imaginations in favor of a more hierarchical order that gets to decide who gets to teach and learn and whose voices count as authoritative.

"Will the master's tools dismantle the master's house?"[215] Will the educational theory and praxis used as a tool for colonization and subjugation, dismantle the same systems that it has helped create? The development of critical pedagogies over the past decades has shown the hard work of reimagining that educators have done to break away from an education that colonizes to an education that liberates and sets people free to learn with one another. I argue that critical pedagogy is a decolonial practice in how it centers marginalized voices in learning and teaching, while fostering critical awareness of the hegemonic epistemologies that silence those voices. This reimagining is crucial in the work of decolonial praxis, which involves creating space for what Walsh describes as "the ongoing serpentine movement toward possibilities of other modes of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, and living; that is, an otherwise in plural."[216]

A. Critical Pedagogy is Decolonial Practice

Critical pedagogy is a decolonial practice in how it centers marginalized voices in learning and teaching while fostering critical awareness of hegemonic epistemologies that have silenced those voices. Critical pedagogy and decoloniality are intrinsically related in the way that both of them

[214] Eleazar Fernandez, *Toward a Theology of Struggle* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 161.
[215] Cf. Audre Lorde, "Will the Master's Tools Dismantle the Master's House?" in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), 110-114.
[216] Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 81.

deal with the colonial matrix of power.[217] In fact, a number of decolonial scholars articulate their own kind of critical pedagogy in their works[218] and a number of critical pedagogues allude to a decolonial framework in problematizing the traditional way in which people have been and continue to be educated.[219] Both fields work together, and the synthesis of the two fields make for an even more robust liberatory practice. Taken together, critical pedagogy becomes a decolonial practice that puts those usually excluded at the center of knowledge production, making space for different ways of knowing, being, and taking action to re-emerge, instead of always being at the margins.

Decoloniality is an ongoing struggle of re-emerging different ways of knowing and being – those that have and are being marginalized by colonial frameworks. In other words, as Walsh also argued, decoloniality "does not imply the absence of coloniality" but it refers more to the "movement toward possibilities of other modes of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, and living."[220] In this sense, decoloniality is not merely a condition to be achieved in the future (since coloniality will probably never disappear)[221] but a continuous resistance against the colonial order towards the re-emergence of the "otherwise." Similarly, decoloniality does not merely mark the time period after formal political colonialism, but it is an ongoing analysis of how ways of thinking now hold people captive. Decolonial practice invites all to take a look at how the colonial order has taken hold of how people think and live and at the same time invites them to imagine an alternate way of living, allowing different frameworks to re-emerge at the center of

[217] In "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21/2-3 (2007): 168-178, Anibal Quijano discusses the coloniality of power in terms of its many forms – in racial dynamics, knowledge production, etc.
[218] See the first part of Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, and Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire: The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).
[219] Cf. Antonia Darder, *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
[220] Mignolo and Walsh, 81.
[221] Mignolo and Walsh, 81.

discourse. This reconfigures the person as a subject of their circumstances – no longer held captive by the colonial order – but as architects in the reconstruction of their lives.[222]

Pedagogy, then, is central in decolonial practice. The word "pedagogy" has usually been linked with approaches and methods in the educational sciences, i.e., how teachers give instruction in their classrooms.[223] Add "critical" and critical pedagogy becomes a discourse on "pedagogy as constitutive of power relations, making power a central category of their analysis" in opposition to more "mainstream" and "traditional" ways of schooling and education[224] wherein power is hierarchically structured and constituted as power over. As will be seen below, critical pedagogies have been instrumental in critiquing the normative ways education has always been done and in reimagining other more liberating ways to learn and teach. In relation to decolonial practice, Walsh argues that "pedagogy has been employed as related to and synonymous with the work of resurgence and insurgence, the work of knowledge (in which we all labor), and [therefore,] the work of decolonial praxis."[225] Pedagogy goes to the heart of decolonial praxis as it problematizes the very structures and people that colonize and subjugate the minds and hearts of the people, in particular, the educational system. The first chapter of this dissertation has demonstrated how education, particularly religious education and catechesis, has made a subjugated people obedient to their colonial masters and their god. The second chapter has shown how colonial church structures have shaped relations of authority and determined who gets to teach and learn in church communities. The contribution of the critical pedagogical

[222] Cf. Mignolo and Walsh 82-83.
[223] Jennifer Gore's introduction has an interesting discussion on pedagogy, feminist pedagogy, and critical pedagogy. Cf. Jennifer Gore, *The Struggle for Pedagogies* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
[224] Gore, 3.
[225] Mignolo and Walsh, 88.

models in this chapter will hopefully offer alternatives and reimagine the "otherwise" in religious education in grassroots church communities in the Philippines.

What critical pedagogies contest, in particular, are the colonizing pedagogical practices within educational institutions. Antonia Darder explains what happens in schools and universities throughout the world: "hegemonic epistemologies have systematically functioned to silence the cultural traditions and knowledge of those deemed 'other.'"[226] Building on Freire, she adds that

> this brutal marginalization of cultural knowledge by the colonizing mainstream is understood as the cultural invasion tied to epistemological forces within schools, still plagued by colonizing formations of domination. In this process, this hidden curriculum of cultural invasion, which has made such a mockery of indigenous knowledge, must be exposed at its most vulnerable point – its pseudo-universal rationality of superiority.[227]

Critical pedagogy exposes the colonial structures of oppression and domination found in the hidden curriculum of educational institutions – whether these be in schools or church communities. The task, then is that of resurgence and insurgence of the knowledge that has been systemically silenced – indigenous, local, native knowledge. In light of this, critical pedagogies such as Freire's "center the histories and cultural ways of knowing of oppressed populations, providing a place at the center of the discourse, rather than forever remaining outside of knowledge construction."[228] Pedagogy can then be understood in this sense "as an essential and indispensable methodology grounded in peoples' realities, subjectivities, histories, and struggles."[229] The site of social struggle becomes, for Freire and many other critical pedagogues, the "pedagogical settings of learning, unlearning, relearning, reflection, and action."[230] These become the site of learning with one another, a site where liberation and life can emerge.

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[226] Darder, 89.
[227] Darder, 89.
[228] Darder, 89.
[229] Mignolo and Walsh, 88.
[230] Mignolo and Walsh, 88.

B. Creating Space for Marginalized Voices

Critical pedagogy, then, is a practice of space-making that centers the voices of those marginalized. As established earlier in this chapter, space is understood here relationally – "as sets of relations between individuals and groups," that can be socially produced.[231] In this sense, critical pedagogy is the practice of producing spaces conducive for individuals and groups to be in relation to one another. This involves a deep understanding of the factors that hinder and promote relationship, factors that pull people closer together or push them apart, factors that encourage participation and responsibility in groups or factors that silence voices. A big part of this understanding in socially producing this space is the circulations of power that go on among the people involved, and critical pedagogy is concerned with voices that have been marginalized, colonized in knowledge production. In understanding why these voices have been marginalized, critical pedagogy can take the necessary steps to reimagine and reconfigure education that allows for the re-emergence of different ways of thinking and being and fosters the recognition of agency of those silenced.

What does the silence say about the spaces where we learn with one another? What does the silence say about the sets of relations between individuals and groups, students and teachers, co-learners with one another? And what are the possibilities of change that can come out from listening to the silence, and being unsettled by the silencing that has been happening? The responsibility of the educator practicing critical pedagogy is to interrogate the power relations that have led to and sustain the silencing of voices with the aim of creating space for these voices to be heard.

[231] Larsen and Beech, 199.

In Gayatri Spivak's famous essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" she problematizes the silence of the subaltern and thinks about issues of female agency and representation in a patriarchal and colonial India. Taking the case of the practice of *sati*, the Hindu practice of widow burning, Spivak demonstrates how two contrasting representations surrounding the performance and abolition of this practice have dominated the discourse about it, leaving the perspective of those actually doing it silenced. White British colonialists abolished this practice as a case of "White men saving brown women from brown men"[232] while the Indian nativist account on the other hand claims that "the women actually wanted to die."[233] Both had different worldviews and values that justify the abolition or the practice of *sati* – the protection of women, the freedom from colonial/imperial control. With two opposite claims, binary oppositions, Spivak says that "one never encounters the testimony of the women's voice-consciousness"[234] and looking for this voice among the many reports and accounts of *sati* practitioners, she finds an explanation from neither a colonialist or a nativist but from an Indian political psychologist and sociologist Ashis Nandy:

> Groups rendered psychologically marginal by their exposure to Western impact . . . had come under pressure to demonstrate, to others as well as to themselves, their ritual purity and allegiance to traditional high culture. To many of them *sati* became an important proof of their conformity to older norms at a time when these norms had become shaky within.[235]

The case from Spivak raises questions about representation, voice, and agency in critical pedagogical discourse. Here she is concerned about the "social text of imperialism" to find out

[232] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea,* Rosalind Morris, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 270.
[233] Spivak, 270.
[234] Spivak, 269.
[235] Spivak, 271; cf. Ahsis Nandy, "Sati: A Ninteenth Century Tale of Women, Violence and Protest," *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India*, ed. V. C. Joshi (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1975), 68.

what it "refuses to say."[236] Investigating stories untold and why these stories have been refused to be told and listened to, Spivak sets about to deviate from the dominant and hegemonic epistemes, creating spaces for these stories to be spoken and to be heard.

The task for critical pedagogy is "not to speak *for* the other, but to find out and illustrate *why the other cannot speak.* In other words, we should not attempt to represent the other, but to "represent how the other is represented, and how these ideologically conditioned representations silence the very object of representation."[237] To abstain from this only makes educators complicit in the silencing of those who cannot speak. This raises the question of representation and the social location of learners and teachers in the space of critical pedagogy, and this becomes a crucial foundation in dialogue and learning with one another: if the task is not to speak *for* the other but to understand why the other cannot speak in the first place, what does dialogue look like and what stance or position can the participants in this dialogue take?

Critiquing power relations in social spaces has to consider the social location of all involved, and the effect of these different locations in the dynamics of dialogue. In Linda Alcoff's essay, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," she takes on similar issues that Spivak discusses above and considers the relationship between social location, epistemology, and the possibility of engaging with one another in education, research, and dialogue. To speak for others is a colonial practice, "born of a desire for mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another's situation or as one who can champion a just cause and thus achieve glory and praise" and the effect of this being "erasure and a reinscription

[236] Spivak, 271; cf. Fredrik Svensson, *Paulo Freire, Gayatri Spivak, and the (Im)possibility of Education: The Methodological Leap in Pedagogy of the Oppressed and "Righting Wrongs"* (Huddinge, Sweden: Södetörn University, 2012), 13.
[237] Svensson, 12.

of sexual, national, and other kinds of hierarchies."[238] For Alcoff, the problem of speaking for others stems from two premises that speak about the connections between the practice of speaking and the epistemological implications of social location. For her, a speaker's social location (or social identity) has an epistemic impact on that speaker's claims and "the rituals of speaking in which an utterance is located, always bears on meaning and truth such that there is no possibility of rendering positionality, location, or context irrelevant to content."[239] In other words, social location or the many identities the person bears always carries meaning to the discourse being done, the decisions made, the way reality and people are represented and so on. Not only is social location epistemically salient, but "certain contexts and locations are allied with structures of oppression, and certain others are allied with resistance to oppression. Therefore, all are not politically equal, and, given that politics is connected to truth, all are not epistemically equal.[240] The second point that Alcoff makes shows how power influences discourse: the power that people wield (either being allied with structures of oppression or resisting that oppression) influences the production of knowledge and shapes the social spaces in which people learn with one another. Alcoff states the problem this way: "In particular, the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for."[241] The discursive context is a political arena and the same is true with the spaces of critical pedagogy. The social spaces being made in critical pedagogy reveals the political nature of

[238] Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter: 1991-1992): 29.
[239] Alcoff, 14. Alcoff defines "rituals of speaking" on page 12 as "discursive practices of speaking or writing that involve not only the text or utterance but their position within a social space including the persons involved in, acting upon, and/or affected by the words." She pays attention to two elements of these rituals: the positionality or location of the speaker and the discursive context
[240] Alcoff, 15.
[241] Alcoff, 7. She gives the example of Anne Cameron speaking for Native Canadian women – the effects of her writing were argued to be counterproductive to the concerns of the Native women.

educational practices. Mindful of the premises above, the critical pedagogue creates the conditions for people to resist structures of oppression present in the practice of discourse.

This presents no simple solution. The premises above imply that there is never a neutral voice in discourse because everyone speaks from where they stand. Social location bears on meaning and truth that is being discussed in discourse. There is also, however, a danger of going towards extremes when addressing the issue at hand: one is when no engagement or discourse happens when the response is "simply to retreat from all practices of speaking for and assert that one can only know one's own narrow individual experience and one's 'own truth' and can never make claims beyond this,"[242] This is a reductionist response that reduces the "evaluation of meaning and truth to a simple identification of the speaker's location,,"[243] a misunderstanding of social location *determining* meaning when it only *bears* upon meaning and truth. On the other hand, one also has to be wary of essentializing the subaltern or the marginalized when referring to those to whom we listen in discourse – the recognition that there are multiple stories in this very wide category. By what authority can people represent one another, or advocate for the other?[244] What are the terms of engagement that are needed for dialogue to appear?

Instead of retreating into individual silos, Alcoff invites a recognition that "We are collectively caught in an intricate, delicate web in which each action I take, discursive or otherwise, pulls on, breaks off, or maintains the tension in many strands of a web in which others find themselves also."[245] Instead of an "us" and a "them," the invitation is for the colonizer and the colonized to see how "we are implicated in each other's lives."[246] From each social location,

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[242] Alcoff, 17.
[243] Alcoff, 17.
[244] Alcoff, 12.
[245] Alcoff, 21.
[246] Anzaldua, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* 2nd Ed. 1999, p. 243. The longer excerpt expresses her ideas more poetically: "I have a term that is called nos-otras, and I put a dash between the nos and otras. The nos is the subject 'we,' that is the people who were in power and the colonized others. The otras is the 'other,' the

the invitation is to interrogate power and privilege and see how these can cause violence and oppression in the web in which they relate with others and at the same time not retreat into this interrogation, but to listen receptively and to speak with those one encounters. Alcoff agrees with Spivak: a "speaking to" is preferred, in which "the intellectual neither abnegates his or her discursive role nor presumes an authenticity of the oppressed but still allows for the possibility that the oppressed will produce a 'countersentence' that can then suggest a new historical narrative."[247] For critical pedagogy, "we should strive to create wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than speaking for others."[248]

C. Case Study: Paulo Freire's Pedagogy

Paulo Freire's educational practice is decolonial in how he has imagined a different modality of education by putting the people's voices at the center of knowledge production, in contrast to what he calls the banking model of education. The space that is being made is a space of dialogue that interrogates colonial structures while opening up the possibility of new ways of thinking and being to emerge.

Throughout his life, Freire has been deeply committed to education and liberation, as seen in how much he has written about critical pedagogy. But aside from his writings, his work in the classroom and communities demonstrates the depth of his commitment and the extent of his vision. In one of his books, he mentioned that his educational convictions matured in his time

colonized group. Then there is also the dash, the divide between us. However, what is happening, after years of colonization, is that all of the divides disappear a little bit because the colonizer, in his or her interaction with the colonized takes on a lot of their attributes. And, of course, the person who is colonizing leaks into our stuff. So we are neither one nor the other; we really are both. There is not a pure other; there is not a pure subject and not a pure object. We are implicated in each other's lives."

[247] Alcoff, 23.

[248] Alcoff, 23.

in Recife where he started an adult literacy program. He created what he called "culture circles" which became spaces where people can learn how to read not only words, but the world – the reality in which they live. The literacy program was different from others that took literacy training in a mechanistic way. Instead of just learning how to read, they were convinced from the beginning that there is a connection between adults learning how to read and the awakening of their social consciousness:

> We wanted a literacy program which would be an introduction to the democratization of culture, a program with men and women as its Subjects rather than as patient recipients, a program which itself would be an act of creation, capable of releasing other creative acts, one in which students would develop the impatience and vivacity which characterize search and invention.[249]

Moving away from primers, which they thought was a top-down way of teaching people how to read, they opted "for the use of 'generative words,' those whose syllabic elements offer, through recombination, the creation of new words."[250] Teaching people how to read and write a syllabic language like Portuguese meant showing students how they can use the syllables to create their own combinations and words. But instead of choosing their own words to teach, the educator-facilitators dialogue with the community, researching a vocabulary of words and sayings that are meaningful to the people with whom they will work. These words are then understood and discussed based on the situations in which the words are encountered. Words like *favela* (slum) has led the group to discussing the problems of "housing, food, clothing, health, and education in a slum…and in which the group further perceives the slum as a problem situation."[251] The facilitator then proceed to show the semantic roots of the word and divides the word into syllables, creating the possibility for the people to create different words, which in turn can open

[249] Paulo Freire, *Education and Conscientization* in *The Paulo Freire Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 82.
[250] Freire, *Education and Conscientization*, 87.
[251] Freire, *Education and Conscientization*, 108.

up different situations to be discussed like *chuva* (rain) in their discussion on the environment, *arado* (plow) from the value of human labor, etc. In learning how to read, this practice opens up the possibility for reflection and discussion on the situations these words find themselves. For Freire, he says that

> Literacy makes sense only in these terms, as the consequence of men's [sic] beginning to reflect about their own capacity for reflection, about the world, about their position in the world, about their work, about their power to transform the world, about the encounter of consciousness…. As illiterate men and women discover the relativity of ignorance and wisdom, they destroy one of the myths by which false elites have manipulated them. Learning to read and write has meaning in that, by requiring men and women to reflect about themselves and about the world they are in and with, it makes them discover that the world is also theirs, that their work is not the price they pay for being citizens but rather a way of loving – and of helping the world to be a better place.[252]

The transformative power of words emphasized in Freire's words above shows the political nature of education. Words bear meaning, and that meaning can either support the oppressor in perpetuating myths people think about themselves or support the oppressed in recognizing their agency, their voice in the liberation of themselves and the transformation of the world. Education is, and never has been, neutral. In learning about the power of words, the people engage in a process of scrutinize the "values, beliefs, myths, and meanings" they have long held to be true about their realities and how things work.

"It is useful here," Darder argues, "to return to the coloniality of power and the manner in which epistemicides in the form of hidden curriculum of banking education are implicated."[253] The decolonial practice that Freire advocates for in the case of Recife's culture circles is an attempt for the people to "reflect on that which they know, their lived experiences, and on how these impact the ways they read their world."[254] The way people understand their world is coded

[252] Freire, *Education and Conscientization*, 106.
[253] Darder, 91.
[254] Darder, 92.

in the way they have been taught to understand the world in traditional schooling, which for the most part has been loaded with colonial baggage. The decolonial project of education, then, begins with an ejection of "the epistemicidal perceptions and colonizing myths about themselves and their world 'that confuse people's awareness and make them ambiguous beings.'"[255] The movement in the process of conscientization[256] is a move away from colonial mentalities into scrutiny of colonial constructs that bind people into subjugation. Like what has been argued earlier, critical pedagogy questions the social locations of the people, asking why the subaltern cannot speak in the first place. For Freire, and decolonial critical pedagogues, they point towards the coloniality of power, the epistemic clashes between the hidden curriculum of the banking model of education and a more freeing way of learning that is being advocated here.

Furthermore, Freire's decolonial pedagogy is a dialogical method. As Darder argues, "Dialogue represents a powerful and transformative decolonizing process of political interaction between people. Hence, dialogue requires the interactive and ongoing participation with and among people."[257] In the example of the culture circles, the educators begin and operate largely on the vocabulary that has been built together with the people. The situations that are brought about by these words become the focal point of the learning, and the people become the Subjects of their own learning and interpretation of these words. Freire has always encouraged teachers to embrace a "problem-posing education" that does not set a pre-determined agenda, but instead "roots itself in the dynamic present and becomes revolutionary"[258] in the way it invites the learners to co-create the agenda of their own learning and puts what they want to learn and what

[255] Darder, 92, cf. Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation* (New York: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1985), 89.
[256] I understand conscientization not as a linear process of enlightenment in which some are more enlightened than others. Instead, it is a more organic and ongoing process of social awakening away from colonizing complexes and subjugation into people recognizing and enacting their agencies in the transformation of their realities.
[257] Darder, 92.
[258] Darder, 91; cf. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 72.

they deem important to discuss at the center of the discourse. The [social] space being made is a community of learners in which all can learn with one another with each one recognizing and hearing all voices that should have a say in the discussion of their realities. As Darder comments: "Through dialogical relationships, students learn to build learning communities in which they freely give voice to their thoughts, ideas, and perceptions about what they know and what they are attempting to understand, always within the context of a larger decolonizing project of emancipation."[259] Again, in contrast to the mechanistic way of learning, this way of learning emphasizes the importance of building relationships and establishing a learning community where people share power together – all the learners and the educators together attempting to understand and make meaning of the issues that they face together as a community.

The pedagogy of Freire is decolonial in the way that it scrutinizes why the subaltern cannot speak and in how it puts the concerns and the realities of the people at the center of learning. Take these two together and we can see how critical pedagogy supports the development of voice in learners, which in itself is a decolonial process "whereby students come to recognize that their voices and participation are politically powerful resources that can be collectively generated in the interest of social justice, human rights, and economic democracy."[260] In his passion for adult (and literacy) education, Freire is convinced that "the word is not the privilege of a few persons, but the right of everyone," and he further asserts that "to exist, humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it."[261] At the heart of critical pedagogy is dialogue – a group of people learning with one another as they try to name the world together through the power of their words. To speak the word is to transform the world together, with the

[259] Darder, 92.
[260] Darder, 94.
[261] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 88.

bigger project of decolonization and emancipation in mind. The recognition of voice and agency is already a big decolonial practice with pedagogy creating space for the possibility of people to move from being victims and subjugated to them becoming subjects and authors of the transformation of their own realities.

Dialogue for Freire is based on love for one another and for the commitment towards liberation.[262] The love allows for a recognition of a community of subjects who do not dominate but liberate one another in their common struggle. Freire's pedagogy is based so much on a humanism that recognizes the intersubjectivity that can go on in communities. As mentioned above, learners are not objects to be dominated but are subjects, and more importantly, subjects in relation with one another. In his letters, he describes people as "the only beings capable of being both the objects and the subjects of the relationships that we weave with others and with the history that we make and that makes and remakes us."[263] In this kind of anthropology, Freire puts an emphasis on relationships built in the practice of learning – people, living in the context of their lived histories, putting their whole embodied beings in front of one another in transforming the world in which they live.

The nuance of dialogue in critical pedagogy will be further explored in the last section of this chapter, but for this case, dialogue is seen as a decolonial practice that creates the space for people to recognize their voices and assert their agency in a learning community that attempts to learn the world with one another.

[262] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 89.
[263] Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* (Routledge, 2005), 136.

II. We Are Part of the Reality that We Seek to Understand: Critical Pedagogy as Material-Discursive Practice

Critical pedagogy has always been concerned with people's engagement with their [material] realities. In Freire's case above, the locus of his pedagogy was on the realities of the people, inviting them into "thinking about reality and people's action upon reality, which is their praxis."[264] For other critical theorists, they problematize discursive practices as ways in which people understand and reclaim power and agency in social spaces – also seen in the discussion above.[265] In this section, I want to push the imagination even further into thinking about how power and agency are not only located in the social domain but also in physical matter. In this understanding, matter is not only the stage upon which critical pedagogy is done, nor "merely an end product"[266] to be transformed in the process of learning. Matter is a co-learner and teacher that educates all about the relationships and entanglements of all beings, and in turn, educates who we are to become.

I argue that critical pedagogy is a material-discursive practice that engages people with their material realities on a deeper level. This kind of education facilitates an embodied learning of place: a learning of people's relationship with the Land and the entanglements of all material bodies with one another. As a material-discursive practice, I account for critical pedagogy that involves not only the social sphere, but the material/natural sphere as well – enlarging the scope of the practice into considering the agency of nonhuman actors as well. As a material-discursive practice, this understanding of critical pedagogy holds the conviction of quantum physicists such

[264] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 106.
[265] Karen Barad discusses this more in depth in relation to the ideas of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler in the first chapter of her book. Cf. Karen Barad, "Entangled Beginnings," *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).
[266] Barad, 66.

as Niels Bohr, that "we are part of that nature that we seek to understand."[267] This new framework moves beyond a representationalist understanding of learning into a notion of knowing as a direct engagement with the material world. As was established above, space is seen in a more relational way. The learning of place with matter is a learning of the relationships that orient how people engage each other and their lived experiences towards realities for peace and justice. The case from Pulangiyen to be discussed below show this – in how they learn with each other in the context of relearning their relationship with Land and their ancestral domain.

A. Critical Pedagogy Is a Material-Discursive Practice

Discursive practices such as learning and teaching create space for people to interrogate power, agency, and voice in the context of structures and cultures of power. In centering marginalized voices, the discourse that happens in critical pedagogy interrogates the reasons why the other cannot speak and it reimagines how dialogue can look like otherwise. Social space and relationality are transformed and made in this analysis of power relations and in changing the power structures within and outside the classroom.

But learning and teaching do not only inhabit the social space. Critical pedagogy interrogates power also through the engagement with material place and the materiality of the bodies that learn. In engaging reality, critical pedagogy is a material-discursive practice that engages all learners into interrogating power and agency as seen not only in the social sphere but in the material as well. Crucial to this understanding is an onto-epistemology that does not pit the physical and the social against each other but sees them in a holistic way. This acknowledges how power is inscribed upon the body and that the material conditions of reality constitute the

[267] Barad, 67.

agency and power that the people have.[268] Furthermore, this framework reimagines the relationship between matter and power, as Karen Barad argues: "To restrict power's productivity to the limited domain of the social, for example, or to figure matter as merely an end product rather than an active factor in further materializations is to cheat matter out of the fullness of its capacity."[269] Barad proposes a deeper look into matter, how matter makes itself felt and a more robust engagement between discursive practice and material phenomena. A material-discursive practice recognizes the role of physical objects not just as a passive given, but as an active agent in the ongoing transformation of the world – matter has the capacity to act and be acted upon. This framework calls for a more dynamic notion of critical pedagogy that is more embodied and widens the community of learners beyond just people into the whole of matter.

Learning, then, is understood as a direct material engagement with reality. For the longest time, education has been based on more Western epistemologies. Learning has been understood in a representationalist way that can be seen engrained in traditional schooling. The Cartesian separation between object and subject demonstrates this: the "I" who thinks and perceives is totally separate from that which is being represented in their minds. The separation of theory and practice[270] in Enlightenment and objectivist thinking has dominated theological and educational discourse in the West for hundreds of years and has had detrimental effects to knowledge production since then. Binary ways of thinking, divorces among many ways of thinking and learning, a hierarchical ordering of reality, have led to an education that disregards matter and

[268] Cf. Note 42 in Barad, 63.
[269] Barad, 66.
[270] Courtney Goto discusses the rise of hegemonic paradigms and the invisible power that these paradigms have in knowledge production. Cf. Courtney Goto's *Taking on Practical Theology: The Idolization of Context and the Hope of Community* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

the body. Education is distanced from an actual engagement with both social transformation and material reality.

The models of critical pedagogy invite learners to rethink their position and role in material reality based on an onto-epistemology that resists the Western Enlightenment framework. Instead of being apart, matter and meaning are seen integrated in this framework, the binaries that have been imposed in the former are being blurred in a new onto-epistemology. One principle in critical pedagogy is that we are part of the reality that we seek to understand. This is based on an understanding of the world as an ongoing flow of agency – not just the agency of humans, but also of other material bodies:

> The world is a dynamic process of intra-activity and materialization in the enactment of determinate causal structures with determinate boundaries, properties, meanings, and patterns of marks on bodies. This ongoing flow of agency through which part of the world makes itself differentially intelligible to another part of the world and through which causal structures are stabilized and destabilized does not take place in space and time but happens in the making of spacetime itself.[271]

With this understanding, critical pedagogy moves away from representationalist notions of learning and moves into a more dynamic and constructive notion of learning as material engagement.[272] Learning and knowing are understood as more embodied practices, as material practices that expresses the person's agency in the concert with the agencies of the material reality surrounding them.[273] In other words, "pedagogy can then be understood as an entanglement of the body with the world (social and material) that we learn with but that also teaches."[274]

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[271] Barad, 140.
[272] Cf. differences between representationalism and social constructivism in Barad's fourth chapter.
[273] Cf. Barad, 54-55 talking about Ian Hacking's theory of manipulability and Barad's own notion of agential realism and the role that practices have in the production of objects.
[274] Tara Page, *Placemaking: A New Materialist Theory of Pedagogy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 103.

As a material-discursive practice, critical pedagogy deals with people's embodied actions as part of the meaning-making that happens in education. Meaning is not only located in the social sphere where people speak and discourse about the issues that matter to them but meaning is also embedded in matter. Meaning is enacted together in the material realm when the agencies of all matter are asserted – when physical bodies interact with other physical bodies in the process of the becoming of the universe. The transformation of reality invites a deeper engagement and entanglement with reality, and it invites a learning from the agency of matter that also teaches and asserts their agencies in their own ways.

The person, as an embodied being, learns with other material bodies around them. What is being learned is not only "content" about the situation, but a learning of relationship: of how all living beings and systems can and do interact and relate with one another. Critical pedagogy envisions a different modality of teaching and learning that seeks people not only to understand other people, but for people to learn from matter as matter also teaches. And matter teaches people to reestablish their relationship with the Land, to recognize the entanglements that all bodies have with one another, and the transformation that happens in the relationship of each other. This is particularly important for critical pedagogy at this point in history: the justice that is being aspired for is not only social justice, but a deeper ecological one that involves the justice of all matter in the unfolding of the universe. This will be demonstrated more in the case study, in the context of the challenges of the Anthropocene.

B. Learning Place

As a material-discursive practice, critical pedagogy is a direct engagement with material reality. Critical pedagogy, then, facilitates the learning of place. However, when it comes to learning

place, it's not only a learning *about* place that happens, but a learning of *relationship* – how all are entangled and interact in the place all inhabit. Given the framework above, the interactions of bodies and matter show a way of learning that is more engaged, a learning by way of *being-with*. Being together is educational in the way the interactions teach about the relationship one can have with the other. Pedagogy is understood then, as bell hooks once described it, as a "union of the mind, body and spirit, not just for striving for knowledge in books, but knowledge about how to live in the world."[275] Furthermore, pedagogy is "an entanglement of the body with the world (social and material) that we learn with but that also teaches."[276] Placemaking is learning how one relates with one another and learning how one can live with one another. Critical pedagogy is both an embodied and a material pedagogy wherein bodies learn with other material bodies and collaborate with them to transform reality and make place. In other words, critical pedagogy is learning new ways of being in space and time.

As an embodied pedagogy, the learning happens in the body that is entangled with other bodies and with the rest of material reality: the body that learns is a body that perceives and actively participates in the world. Meaning and placemaking are not made just socially, but they are also bodily made through embodied engagement with the world.[277] Departing from the Cartesian body-mind dichotomy, other philosophers like Merleau-Ponty argue that "the lived body is our general medium for having a world."[278] Perception, as a practice, is an engagement with the world that also perceives and interacts with the body. Knowing the socio-material world is not seen here as a distant observation of matter outside the body as in a vacuum, but it is seeing the relationship of the body interacting with other material bodies around it. Perception

[275] hooks, 15.
[276] Page, 103.
[277] Page, 106.
[278] Page, 106, cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London : Routledge,1962), 146.

and knowing involve the active participation in reality: "To sense is not simply to receive input – it is to reinvent… Sense perceptions are not simply 'out there' to be analyzed by a static body. They are body-events [where] bodies, senses, and worlds recombine to create (invent) new events."[279] The active participation of the body with the socio-material world is the way in which learning happens in critical pedagogy. Learning with matter is a "situated learning" where "learning is no longer a passive process of absorbing factual information but is instead a social and collaborative process whereby theory is entangled with everyday practices with others."[280] The interactions of bodies in the socio-material world is a learning of co-existence. The interactions between bodies and matter are a form of collaborative learning wherein together, they can make something new, redefining how one ought to be in relation with the other.

The body learns and teaches by perceiving and actively participating in the socio-material world. But how does matter actually teach? In her book *Placemaking*, the educational theorist Tara Page gives an example of pottery, explaining how her body learns with the clay:

> Through and with my body I was learning the feel of the clay, adjusting the speed of the wheel, the exact amount of water I needed to ensure slippage, and adjusting, tweaking, learning the constant and correct pressure and play of clay with my fingers, hands, arms, shoulder, back – my body. The matter – the clay, the wheel, the water – was teaching me what it could and could not do, how far it could be pulled and pushed. The between of body with the matter wherein the matter teaches, and we are learning what it can do and what it cannot do; an embodied but also a material pedagogy. With placemaking it is the matter of the place-world, the Land, that teaches and that we learn with.[281]

As can be seen above, learning takes place in the "between," where the body learns from the matter that teaches. In this between, what the learner sees is their relationship with the other material bodies that are present. The presence of matter teaches what it can and cannot do, how

[279] Erin Manning, "Taking the Next Step: Touch as Technique," *The Senses & Society* 4/2 (2009): 212.
[280] Page, 112.
[281] Page, 111.

far it could be pulled and pushed, and what happens otherwise. Learning is being present, responsive, to matter and what it tries to teach those who bother to see and listen. Learning place in this between shows the relationship all have to the Land and how one can live with what the Land teaches. In Page's book, she describes the relationship of the children in the bush in Australia with the Land – understood not just as material place, but as "the intra-actions of socio-material-spiritual-embodied"[282] entanglements. What is learned from the Land is the way one can live in harmony, co-existence with their place-worlds:

> Rather than knowing and understanding this place-world as something to battle and be at odds with, the children are entangled with the Land. This intra-action of bodies with the socio-material of the place-world is a knowledge and understanding 'that is reducible to a sort of co-existence with place.'[283]

Learning placemaking is all about this co-existence; it is "is not just about developing one's own individual knowledge and practices. It also involves understanding who we are and how and where we are 'with' bodies and matter."[284] The Land teaches people who they are in relation to other material bodies, informs the practices of living in the place-world, and shows the deep relationships each one has with one another.

On the flipside, the absence of matter also teaches. The body remembers the knowledge of possibility of matter. For example, in Page's case, the absence of water dominates the practices of living and placemaking in the Australian bush. Learning how valuable water is, especially when it's gone, formed their practices of saving and preserving water until the next rain comes. As a material and embodied pedagogy, learning placemaking is seeing how both the body and matter interact with one another to create meaningful relationship that defines how they ought to live, to be with each other:

[282] Page, 111.
[283] Page, 116, cf. Merleau-Ponty, 105.
[284] Page, 117.

> This place-world is one that has so much but at the same time so little: the presence and absence of matter, the tension between beauty and terror. But what is really interesting is the very space between matters. This is because it is a space of differences, there is a push and pull of the intra-actions of humans and the materiality of this unique landscape, and the very material and embodied pedagogy that is needed to live with this place- world that lacks sustaining matter.[285]

Critical pedagogy's interaction with reality is a learning of place, which in turn is a learning of relationships and how to live those relationships. In making place together, matter "teaches us through resisting dominant discourses," such as those mentioned in the previous section that establish a dominating and rigid hierarchy between the oppressor and the oppressed, humans and nonhumans, body and soul. Instead, "these embodied knowledges and practices can then be used to empower and also disrupt the hegemonies and politics of power"[286] – matter, as was established above, also wields power in how it teaches and shows what can and cannot be done.

Critical pedagogy is "the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world"[287] Learning place in critical pedagogy is "learning new ways of being,"[288] a reimagining – a realizing – of relationships and entanglements, but more importantly, an invitation to live anew. As Page argues, learning place is

> a practice in which learning as responsiveness to matter and to space-time-mattering occurs within the contingencies, differences and diversity of life that concerns itself not only with relationalities of power, constituted and reproduced by bodies, but also with how bodies participate in/with these relationships.[289]

As a new way of being-with, power is also reimagined as seen in how it is constituted by matter and bodies. The interaction between the two creates new configurations, new forms of living,

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[285] Page, 115.
[286] Page, 119.
[287] Page, 118 cf. Freire *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 16.
[288] Page, 119.
[289] Page, 118.

new forms of sharing power that is different from the dominating and oppressive ways of wielding power.

C. Case Study: The Pedagogy of the Pulangiyen

Critical pedagogy engaging material reality in a deeper way can be seen in the pedagogy of the Pulangiyen, a group of Indigenous people in Bukidnon in the southern part of the Philippines. The Pulangiyen are children of the Land, the river, and the forest – they live along the Pulangi River (from which they get their name) and they have relied on the forest for their basic needs (their culture and beliefs are rooted in the forest).[290] Their community education is a learning from the wisdom of their culture, of what it means to live and belong to the land. In their educational practices and their pedagogy that listens not only to each other and their elders but also to the earth, the Pulangiyen demonstrates a critical pedagogy that teaches how to be with each other.

The education program with the Pulangiyen began as an effort to introduce children to the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic; and also, to encourage adults to do the same. The literacy program expanded over the years into its current form today: "an Indigenous People's community school offering a basic education program and integrating community and cultural knowledge."[291] They call the school the *Apu Palamguwan* Cultural Education Center and their approach to education consists not merely to solve problems with short-term solutions, but to learn what it means to live a sustainable life from understanding their culture and the community's way of life.[292]

[290] Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center, *Culture-Based Education in a Community School* (Pasig: Department of Education, 2012),16.
[291] Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center, 6.
[292] Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center, 7.

The environmentalist Jesuit Pedro Walpole has been collaborating with the Pulangiyen for decades. He observes two things that are evident in Pulangiyen culture – first, "the valuing of knowledge and learning, and second, a belonging-to-the-land – the *gaup* or ancestral domain."[293] As the community defines it, the "gaup is the physical area where they live and carry out their traditions and way of life," geographically, they described the following as being included in their ancestral domain:

> The gaup includes the village and extending out to the rivers and surrounding forests along the Pantaron mountains. It is the location of livelihood activities, farming, hunting, and gathering, as well as the different sites for spiritual ritual.[294]

The land is central to their identity as a people. As mentioned above, the Pulangiyen relies on the land for their basic needs, and they hold the conviction that they should be responsible in maintaining the land as well. They get their name from the land, from the river that runs through the land – and not only that, but they get their identities from the land through which they are in relation. In recent decades, the land has seen deforestation and strife. In the 1960s and 70s, during the time of the dictatorship, logging by outside groups and conflict between the military and armed rebel groups disrupted the traditional way of life of the community. The Pulangiyen were once a nomadic people moving up and down the mountain. However, when the deforestation came, they decided to stake their claim to their domain, their *gaup*.

As it is central to their lives as an Indigenous people, the *gaup* is also central to their education – it is "where education starts, develops, and is sustained."[295] Their ancestral domain brings together "the values and knowledge of previous generations as a context of learning for the next generations."[296]

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[293] Pedro Walpole, "Environment Is Solidarity," *Heythrop Journal* 59/6 (2018): 990.
[294] Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center, 34.
[295] Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center, 7.
[296] Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center, 7.

> The gaup is the context of learning and one of the primary objectives of education is the effective management of the gaup that encompasses both the community and land. The culture-based system utilized in APC draws on the resources within the domain as content and learning materials. Because the culture is used as content, lesson plans incorporate the reality of community life and tackle topics such as land productivity, trade and livelihood, and employment opportunities.[297]

The culture-based curriculum that the school has approaches education as a way to "allow students to remain rooted in their cultural identity, while developing the skills and competencies that are required to engage and integrate with broader society."[298] The initial objectives for the education program was for community development – which they initially defined as having sustainable livelihoods by which basic needs are met without the land being impoverished.[299] The vision of education, then, is different from mainstream schooling. As Walpole explains:

> The basic principle underlying this model is that for an indigenous community, education is not just a school where some individuals excel but also a way of life. Therefore, the school is a community resource and what children learn should be what impacts community life and sustains the environment.[300]

With culture, the environment, and this notion of education in mind, the program started out teaching what the students need to learn from their culture and engaging them into reflecting on matters about the land, encouraging collective action.

For example, the forest is one of their primary concerns – the sustainability of the environment and the stewardship of the land that takes care of them. One of the practices that they do is walking through the forest to neighboring villages to share news with other villages, but also to learn the current condition of the forest. "Together we have learned to give value to the twenty species that give structure to the forest with several thousand other species, and to the

[297] Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center, 27.
[298] Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center, 28.
[299] Pedro Walpole, *Learning Sustainable Life: Bukidnon Pulangiyen Community Experience of Integrating Mother Tongue Education for Sustainable Development* (Apu Palamguwan Cultural Center, 2009), 20.
[300] Walpole, *Learning Sustainable Life*, 20.

pioneer species returning after land is cleared,"[301] Walpole recounts. Within the school is an institute that pays close attention to environmental concerns, the forest walk being part of their main educational activities. The effect of which is seen in how "the children learn in school the deep knowledge of their culture of how to regenerate their forest and how to set a forest line to protect land, all life and water sources."[302] In walking into the forest, education is being with the trees and learning about their current relationship with the land. What is learned is responsiveness to the situation and a rethinking of how they are to live sustainably and restore the forest.

This was strengthened when *Laudato Si* was published, the Pulangiyen youth were surprised at how deeply they resonated with Francis' words.[303] In a synodal process that took place with Indigenous youth, they reflected more deeply on their situation – listening to each other's experiences in the community, taking the *Laudato Si* goals into their own context, and seeing how they can move forward together.[304] Their calls to action after this synodal process is a long list that they added to their already ongoing efforts like the restoration efforts for the forest and watershed and collaborating with tribal councils. What these all had in common was their attention and their naming of their spirituality as an ecological spirituality for action that will guide their efforts in the future.

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[301] Walpole, "Environment Is Solidarity," 990.
[302] Walpole, "Environment Is Solidarity," 990-991.
[303] Balay Laudato Si, *Living Laudato Si' in the Heart of Mindanao: A 2019 Activity Report,* 1. https://apupalamguwancenter.essc.org.ph/?p=3281.
[304] *Laudato Si'* is the encyclical by Francis on the care for our common home. In that encyclical, he discusses issues about the environment and its intersections with the mission of the church. The center Balay Laudato Si', renamed as such after the publishing of the encyclical, was already doing work in Bendum since 1992. The report *Living Laudato Si' in the Heart of Mindanao* recounts the renaming of the center: "When the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'* (from which the center is named after) first came out, youth leaders from the community were astounded to find themselves able to identify with the message of Pope Francis," and referring to paragraph 179 that refers to values of Indigenous people, the report continues: "This recognition of the role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in making a difference in the world is a great consolation and affirmation for vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities who are not always heard." In *Living Laudato Si': Activity Report 2019,* 3-4.

Critical pedagogy as learning a way of life, is not only about reflecting on material reality, but directly engaging in reality that also teaches them. With this model of education, they have a deep understanding that they are part of the reality that they seek to understand. Their culturally-grounded education shows close attention to integral ecology and a synodal listening not only to each other, but to the Land. What happens here is a learning of place, wherein the Pulangiyen learn their relationship with their Land and ways of living sustainably and peacefully with each other.

III. Towards a Conclusion: Critical Pedagogy as Dialogue

This chapter attempted to highlight two characteristics of critical pedagogy. First, critical pedagogy is a decolonial practice that creates space for marginalized voices to be at the center of discussion. Critical pedagogy asks why these voices have been marginalized and silenced in the first place and reconfigures the social space so that their voices may not only be heard but amplified. Second, critical pedagogy is a material-discursive practice that facilitates the learning of place, where learners learn about their relationships with the Land and each other. Critical pedagogy is learning new ways of being that is different from the dominant and colonial ways of being that people have gotten used to. In reconfiguring education this way, critical pedagogy is not merely a reflection on reality, but a deep and meaningful engagement with material reality in which the learners belong.

Education, then, is dialogue – a practice of creating spaces of encounter, listening, and collective action. As a decolonial practice, critical pedagogy creates the possibilities for people and communities to listen to one another, especially those voices that have been marginalized. As a material-discursive practice, critical pedagogy widens the community who dialogues – instead of just people listening to each other, this framework beckons people to listen also to the

land and to engage matter directly. Critical pedagogy creates spaces of encounter and dialogue is seen not only as people talking to one another, but as people and matter listening, talking, engaging, relating, and interacting with one another.

What the two characteristics in this chapter have shown is that the question of what dialogue is and what it looks like for today continues to be asked. Raimon Panikkar thinks of a "dialogical dialogue" that goes beyond a dialectical dialogue. The goal of this is for a more authentic understanding "of the other that allows for true mutual communication in the intent to forge a common language that knows how to traverse the limits of one's own particular language."[305] In opening oneself to the other, the hope is not just mutual respect of the other's position, but a mutual enrichment given an authentic engagement that one has with the other. A dialogical encounter goes beyond the level of "the dialectic of ideas where competition dominates, and victory belongs to the strongest."[306] Dialogue opens up the space for encounter: for voices to be heard by one another, for perspectives to be challenged and changed for the better, and for a "third voice" to be developed in the dialogical encounter. The dynamics of this will be demonstrated more extensively in the next chapter that will discuss participatory action research.

Given this educational foundation, learning with one another requires the creation of spaces of encounter where marginalized voices and matter are included in the dialogue that takes multiple forms. With education reconfigured as a way of learning to be-with and as a way of learning new ways of being, multiple possibilities arise that can manifest this educational

[305] Raimon Panikkar, "Dialogical dialogue or dialogal dialogue." Raimon Panikkar Official Website, Accessed 28 March 2024, https://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/gloss-dialogical.html.
[306] Panikkar, "Dialogical dialogue or dialogal dialogue."

configuration. One such form is participatory action research that can be used in a decolonial and synodal religious education.

CHAPTER FOUR

EXPANDING THE IMAGINATION:

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH AS DIALOGUE

At the beginning of this dissertation, I ask, "How does a decolonial and synodal religious education look like?" In a way, this is a question about pedagogy, of method, of thinking about different modalities of education that could facilitate teaching and learning in grassroots communities. In writing this dissertation, I wanted to interrogate different practices and learn from them in trying to answer the question above. This dissertation is an invitation into reimagining practices of education, of learning with one another, of creating spaces for people to do so. So far, I've set up two important foundations for a decolonial and synodal religious education. The first takes its cues from a theology of synodality that encourages the community present into listening not only to each other, but also to the Spirit speaking in and through them. The second is based on principles of critical pedagogy that reimagines education as a practice of space-making wherein educators facilitate the process of learning that involves capacitating voices, engaging with reality together, and dialogue. These foundations are important in the discussion to follow.

Research is a practice where people could learn with one another, and a practice that I want to explore for this chapter. Researching with grassroots communities has had a long and complicated history.[307] As seen before, this kind of research has raised some ethical concerns and

[307] See for example the article by Eve Tuck about damage-centered research in "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79/3 (2009): 409-427 and the cases mentioned by Linda Alcoff in "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991-1992): 5-32.

issues about representation. Even with good intentions, previous methods used to generate new knowledge usually have the tendency to not benefit the community at all, perpetuating cycles of colonization in the field of research. In contrast, participatory action research (henceforth abbreviated to PAR) intentionally reimagines the way research is done that involves the community as co-researchers, taps into local knowledges, and is oriented towards action.[308] PAR uses an educational configuration to engage people in the process of knowledge production. From identifying the research question, gathering data, analyzing that data, to publishing the findings or results, and taking action based on the latter, the community is involved in the entire process. In this research process, PAR pays close attention to the dynamics of inclusion, power, agency, and community to ensure that the method used is just and not only does not do harm but seeks to enhance wellbeing. In a way, PAR opens wide the methodological imagination as it democratizes research and serves the benefit of those involved. Thus, I propose PAR as one possible way for grassroots church communities to learn with and teach one another. Education as a practice of space-making, can be seen in a concrete way in the practice of participatory action research that continues to bear witness to an alternative research tradition that creates spaces for grassroots communities to mobilize for justice. The possibilities of a different way of dialogue and learning are ripe in PAR; these will be explored in this chapter.

I argue that PAR expands the methodological and pedagogical imagination in the way that it creates spaces for people to learn with one another towards transformation – it's a way of engaging local knowledges that gives rise to what some have called a "third voice."[309] The third

[308] Steven Jordan has documented the historical roots of PAR and its different lineages. While PAR is a method originating from the margins, it has been appropriated in a neoliberal setting. Cf. Steven Jordan, "From a Methodology of the Margins to Neoliberal Appropriation and Beyond: The Lineages of PAR" in *Education, Participatory Action Research, and Social Change,* Dip Kapoor and Steven Jordan eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 16-27.

[309] As discussed in this chapter, the notion of the third voice comes from the work of M. Brinton Lykes in her collaboration with many psychologists and communities. The first instance this appeared was in an article that

voice is a result of the whole participatory process – a new perspective that arises from a kind of dialogue that is not only an exchange of ideas, but a meeting and being with another. This chapter will have three parts. The first will introduce the method of PAR, having roots from activist education in the Global South that puts the people's knowledge at the center of education and research while considering the people as co-researchers in the whole process. The second will look into a central dynamic of the method of PAR: dialogue. What can be learned about dialogue, and how does PAR reimagine how dialogue works? In the second part, I argue that PAR facilitates dialogue in such a way that it leads to a "third voice" – a voice arising from and articulated by all those involved, a voice that speaks newness as a result of collaboration and mutual listening of different perspectives. The chapter will close with a few considerations for the practice of PAR for the next chapter as a way for communities to learn with one another. In a religious education setting, this sets the stage for a theology of PAR.

I. The P, the A, and the R: Expanding the Methodological Imagination

PAR has its roots in activist research in the Global South. In the Caribbean coast of Colombia, a group of peasant activists were mobilizing against large landholdings. The National Association of Peasant Users (ANUC), with Juana Julia Guzman as one of their leaders, collaborated with Orlando Fals Borda[310] and a group of researchers to advance the direct action of the campesinos, promote class consciousness, and work towards lasting social change. Fals Borda named this

problematizes the notion of voice and representation in a liberatory community psychology, i.e. whose voices are represented in research? Cf. M. Brinton Lykes, Martin Terre Blanche, and Brandon Hamber, "Narrating Survival and Change in Guatemala and South Africa: The Politics of Representation and a Liberatory Community Psychology," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 31/1-2 (March 2003): 79-90.

[310] Orlando Fals Borda is a Colombian sociologist and is regarded as one of the founders of participatory action research. Among his extensive list of works is a book written with Muhammad Anisur Rahman where he discusses his method of research, *Action and Knowledge: Breaking the Monopoly with Participatory Action Research* (New York: Apex Press, 1991). More recently, Joanne Rappaport wrote a book documenting Fals Borda's life and work in *Cowards Don't Make History: Orlando Fals Borda and the Origins of Participatory Action Research* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

process "action research" wherein "external researchers joined forces with social movements to harness social investigation for political ends by building an intellectual relationship between equals, what Fals termed a symbiosis between 'people's knowledge' and 'scientific knowledge.'"[311] The marriage between the people's knowledge and scientific knowledge, the meeting of academic research and social movements, has changed research as we know it, initiating what is now known as participatory action research.

From its start in activist scholarship in the Global South, PAR has been a tool for decolonization. PAR widens the methodological imagination as it decolonizes the way research is done. Instead of the process being solely at the hands of "expert researchers," PAR involves the people not merely as informants but as co-researchers. Informed by the works of Paulo Freire and the critical pedagogy he was developing in Brazil, Fals Borda felt no need "to appeal to any authority in the tradition called 'the Western academy' in order to achieve our own approach to our own reality."[312] This modality of research disrupts colonial relations and power dominance that has been made the norm by the Western academy for the longest time.[313] As PAR engages the people's knowledge, it engages different ways of knowing and being – different ontologies, epistemologies, and knowledge systems, different sources of wisdom and knowledge.

PAR disrupts dominant notions of research and education as it offers different modalities for the work of being, knowing and doing towards social transformation. Instead of "experts" taking charge of analyzing and articulating ways forward for social change upon consultation with the communities involved, PAR diffuses agency and participation as it involves the people

[311] Joanne Rappaport, *Cowards Don't Make History: Orlando Fals Borda and the Origins of Participatory Action Research* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 7.
[312] Orlando Fals Borda and Carlos Rodriguez Brandao, *Investigacion Participativa* (Montevideo: Instituto del Hombre, 1986), 17.
[313] Caroline Lenette, *Participatory Action Research: Ethics and Decolonization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 27.

not only as subjects of research but as active agents in the transformation of their own realities. In this way, PAR decolonizes research and becomes a tool for social justice. But I argue that PAR takes it a step further: PAR is not only a research *for* social justice, but it is a way of doing research that is just – a practice of justice itself. This section will look at three crucial themes to define and describe the methodology of PAR. The first theme is how PAR taps into local knowledges and how research is done this way – decolonizing research. The second interrogates the role of the people as co-researchers in the PAR process – the prospects and limits of participation. The third looks into the transformation that is done in PAR, seeing how justice is enacted not just in the fruits of the process, but in the process itself – action.

A. Research: Engaging Local Knowledges

Research is a practice of producing knowledge. But what kind of knowledge counts for research? Who gets to participate in the practice of producing knowledge? Whose knowledge counts as research? And what does research look like otherwise? Any discussion on PAR raises these important questions, which are really questions that interrogate the nature of doing research and the nature of knowledge itself. In asking these questions, PAR disrupts dominant research traditions by de-centering a positivist model of research and instead engages with different local knowledges that have usually been neglected or objectified in traditional research. In decolonizing research, PAR opens wide the methodological imagination and opens up a pluriverse of different ways of knowing, being and doing.

The dominant research tradition has a positivist model of knowledge production. What this means is that it assumes objectivity, is oriented towards searching for a single truth, and centers the position of the researcher as neutral, as the expert and as the sole bearer or producer

of knowledge. Much of this paradigm has to do with an Enlightenment/modernist epistemology that has shaped a dominant understanding of knowledge:

> The defining characteristics of modernism include the notions that knowledge can be (and is, if the rules are followed) objective, impartial, innocent in intention and affect, and neutrally discovered; that there is only one true method by which knowledge is acquired; and that knowledge can be discovered by a rational subject who is distanced from her or his object of investigation and who separates her or himself from emotions, self-interest, and political values.[314]

This way of research perpetuates a dominant paradigm wherein a "dominant [Western] worldview is not just one way to view the world; it is positioned as the most legitimate way to view the world, and as such, it is difficult to resist."[315] A decolonial view de-centers the claim that the dominant research tradition holds, i.e. their methods, their tools, are the only legitimate way to view the world. Instead, "for many criticalists from around the world, positivist universalism reveals itself as a dimension of dominant power that perpetuates oppression and silences voices outside the mainstream."[316] In doing so, universalist knowledge invalidates the different forms of knowledge and expertise "of the poor, racially marginalized groups, indigenous peoples, women, and colonized cultures" and dismisses "diverse forms of human genius".[317]

PAR is a concrete expression of the decolonial turn in research as it reimagines the way research is done. "Critical PAR," Joe Kincheloe argues, "is directly focused on disrupting these modes of epistemological and ideological oppression."[318] PAR is founded upon a "critical

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[314] Susan Strega, "The View from the Poststructural Margins: Epistemology and Methodology Reconsidered" in *Research as Resistance: Revisiting Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches*, Second Ed., Susan Strega and Leslie Brown, eds. (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2015), 122.
[315] Strega, 121
[316] Joe Kincheloe, "Critical Complexity and Participatory Action Research: Decolonizing 'Democratic' Knowledge Production" in *Education, Participatory Action Research, and Social Change*, Dip Kapoor and Steven Jordan, eds. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 115.
[317] Kincheloe, 115.
[318] Kincheloe, 116.

complex epistemology" that recognizes that "the social web of reality is composed of too many variables to be considered and controlled in a positivistic model"[319] and instead offers an alternative that deploys "multiple methods of producing knowledge of the world" with "its maze of uncontrollable variables, irrationality, nonlinearity, and unpredictable interaction of wholes and parts."[320] PAR departs from a different understanding of the nature of knowledge. Instead of a single approach to reality, PAR holds different knowledges at once in their complexities.

The research in PAR is an engagement with the pluriverse. Arturo Escobar describes the pluriverse as "the idea of multiple worlds," coming from the Zapatista concept of "a world in which many worlds might fit."[321] The concept of the pluriverse is in stark contrast to the dominant positivist research tradition, as he explains:

> whereas the West has managed to universalize its own idea of the world, which only modern science can know and thoroughly study, the notion of the pluriverse inverts this seductive formula, suggesting pluriversality as a shared project based on a multiplicity of worlds and ways of worlding life.[322]

In engaging with the pluriverse, PAR opens people up to the multiple ways of knowing and being, multiple local knowledges and ontologies. Giving access to them, but also inviting people into participating in these alternative ways of being.

What Escobar has noticed with the different frameworks is that contrary to the dominant epistemology, the epistemologies of the Global South are more relational ways of knowing and being.[323] Instead of separating entities in a dualist framework, these frameworks show how interrelated we all are. Arturo Escobar calls this "relational ontology," wherein "nothing

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[319] Kincheloe, 109.
[320] Kincheloe, 110.
[321] Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 26.
[322] Escobar, 26.
[323] Escobar describes this in terms of a "single-world doctrine" that features a twofold ontological divide: "a particular way of separating humans from nature (the nature-culture divide); and the distinction and boundary policing between 'us' (civilized, modern, developed) and 'them' (uncivilized, underdeveloped), those who practice other ways of worlding (the colonial divide)" in *Pluriversal Politics*, 75.

preexists the relations that constitute it. Said otherwise, things and beings are their relations; they do not exist prior to them."[324] All beings interweave in relationship. The pluriverse is a tool that engages the many alternatives and ontologies – a transition from one-world concepts to concepts that are centered upon "a multiplicity of mutually entangled and co-constituting but distinct worlds."[325]

As a result, research is then reconfigured. PAR now assumes a different epistemological foundation: "the mind creates rather than reflects, and the nature of this creation cannot be separated from the surrounding world."[326] The practice of research is redefined: instead of a distanced rational researcher observing the world, research then becomes an engagement with the world – a practice of the researcher who is very much interrelated with all other beings or living systems in the world. The researcher is part of the world they seek to understand. Research is a material-discursive practice that is part of the ongoing becoming/unfurling of the universe.

B. Participation: Creating Space for Co-researchers

Whereas the dominant research tradition assumes that the researcher/team of researchers, most typically from academia, are the sole experts of their field of research, PAR reimagines this approach by engaging the communities involved not just as informants, but also as co-researchers. The research arises from the community of co-participants who have identified a challenged in their lived experience. The co-participants are involved in the whole processes that will be done in collecting data, the frameworks to be used in analyzing that data, and ultimately decides what to do with the fruits of the whole process. The marriage between the "people's

[324] Escobar, 72.
[325] Escobar, 75.
[326] Kincheloe, 109.

knowledge" and "scientific knowledge" that was described by Fals Borda above leads to the affirmation that the local knowledge encountered in the community is a valid way of engaging the world, but at the same time, transforms academic knowledge into serving the communities it wishes to study.

This reconfiguration takes a lot of work, paying close attention to the power dynamics at play in the relationship between external researchers, that is, those from outside the community, and participants, that is, co-researchers or those from within the community. This has also been described as relationality or relationships between grassroots communities and academic researchers – relationships and structures of power within and between the groups mentioned. As discussed in the previous chapter, the social location of the people involved always carries meaning that are reflected in the discourse being generated, the decisions made, the way reality and the people are being represented. Implicit biases and frameworks from all co-researchers shape the production of knowledge and frame research in particular ways. In other words, social location is epistemically salient and intertwined with the power dynamics that affect the relationships between those involved: "certain contexts and locations are allied with structures of oppression, and certain others are allied with resistance to oppression…. All are not epistemically equal."[327] PAR is an effort to level the playing field and expose the identities and different ways of knowing that those involved. In PAR, these identities are not only acknowledged, but they are also interrogated in how they contribute to the power dynamics – a process in PAR and empirical research called critical self-reflexivity. "Researchers and participants," Brinton Lykes and Alison Crosby explain, "are situated in the matrices of

[327] Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991-1992): 15.

intertwining social interactions that both constrain and facilitate the relationships they develop, as well as the action and research processes they generate."[328]

This is similar to the problem that was raised in the middle of the previous chapter: the development of voice in critical pedagogy requires a critique of power relations in social spaces since social locations may either be allied with circuits of privilege or marginalization. The case of speaking for/with others in the previous chapter can happen in the setting of research – to speak for others is a colonial practice born of a desire for mastery. To represent others in research in a monopolizing way is a colonial practice born of a desire for mastery over the researched, doing continuous harm to the community. Eve Tuck has given a comprehensive account of the harms done by researchers in communities. With the arrogance and absence of reflexivity by White researchers, she says that their research on indigenous communities "has historically been damage centered, intent on portraying our neighborhoods and tribes as defeated and broken…. it is a pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community."[329]

While acknowledging the dangers present in a colonial practice of research, PAR engages, bridges and challenges the static notion of insider/outsider, researcher/participant, even teacher/student and "emphasizes instead the mediated and progressive nature of our relationships and our shared action-reflection processes."[330] In this critical self-reflexivity in research, PAR recognizes the intersectional identities and relationships that each person has while taking a more dialogical approach that contributes to developing a process of co-constructing knowledge together.

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[328] M. Brinton Lykes & Alison Crosby, "Feminist Practice of Action and Community Research" in *Feminist Research Practice*, Second Ed. (London: Sage, 2014), 162.
[329] Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage," *Harvard Educational Review* 79/3 (Fall 2009): 412-413.
[330] Lykes and Crosby, 162.

To invite participants to draw on their local experiences and ways of knowing in dialogue with others as co-creators towards knowledge production, PAR is a way of making space, of being critically aware of the power dynamics at play, and of seeking ways to create a space where every voice matters. Much of PAR has to do with capacitating voices to participate in the research process. From critical pedagogical principles, particularly Freire's approach, PAR facilitates speaking and listening through the reconfiguration of relationships and through an education that is dialogue.

In Freire's own practice of his pedagogy with the peasants in Brazil, he engaged them into identifying generative themes that are central to the participant's daily lives, which they know from their experiences. He says, "they, too, know things they have learned in their relations with the world and with other women and men."[331] Freire says that they often distrust themselves and what they know, often deferring to another who they have long considered to be more knowledgeable about matters – a boss, a teacher using the banking model of education, an oppressor. From this context of self-depreciation and fatalism, the method used by Freire engages marginalized voices into acknowledging that they too know something by way of their relations in the world.

"The word is not the privilege of a few persons, but the right of everyone."[332] He asserts that "to exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it."[333] Naming, voicing out the situations in which they live can help them through a critical reflection that happens in dialogue. The very heart of this pedagogy of critical reflection-action happens in dialogue – a group of people encountering each other, naming the world together through words. Each person has a part in this

[331] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 63.
[332] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 88.
[333] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 88.

process and in the encounter of voices, the critical reflection can decode the oppressive structures that are found in the world and within themselves as well. To speak the word is to transform the world together. It is in dialogue that participants can recognize their capacity to change their realities and to be agents of social transformation.

C. Action: Research for Justice, Research as Justice

PAR marks a shift in the reasons why research is undertaken. Instead of a search for knowledge "for knowledge's sake," researchers and communities now engage together in the latter's struggles for change.[334] Action research emphasizes the linkages between theory and practice – the practice of research is seen as an engagement with reality and positioned at "the service of human flourishing."[335] Human flourishing and the promotion of human dignity becomes an objective of PAR, as Elizabeth Conde-Frazier describes, "PAR moves us toward social justice by integrating different forms of information… with the purpose of seeing how these mitigate against the full humanity or dignity of themselves and others."[336] As researchers join liberation and social change movements in their struggles, research becomes a tool for social justice. What is formed are deep solidarities that create space for collaboration in learning what it means to work for justice together:

> the initiatives sought to develop solidarity between the educated, professional elite and poor and marginalized populations of the majority world. In each context the challenge was to move beyond the professional responsibility to provide charity through a welfare system or state (in the Northern Hemisphere) or economic development (in the Southern Hemisphere), to a transformational praxis.[337]

[334] Brinton Lykes and Amelia Mallona, "Towards Transformational Liberation: Participatory and Action Research and Praxis" in *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice,* Second Ed., Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, eds. (London: SAGE Publications, 2008), 110.
[335] Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, "Introduction" in *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice,* Second Ed., Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, eds. (London: SAGE Publications, 2008), 1.
[336] Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice," *Religious Education* 101/3 (2006): 322-323.
[337] Lykes and Mallona, 114.

PAR's orientation toward social justice is informed by its roots in the Global South and the influence of critical pedagogy in its methods. As Brinton Lykes and Amelia Mallona point out about the early practitioners of PAR, "Writing about participatory and action research in the late 1960s and 1970s, Indian and Latin American educators and social change advocates acknowledged the centrality of Paulo Freire's praxis of critical consciousness, that is, *conscientizacão* [conscientization], for their work."[338] In Freire's adult literacy programs (as discussed in the previous chapter), the critical step is in how the people form a critical consciousness of their realities and their capabilities to transform these realities. PAR takes this on as it invites communities to co-construct knowledge with each other, not only for knowledge's sake, but as a deep engagement with their socio-political contexts.

The work for justice and transformation is often seen as the objective for which PAR is undertaken. However, justice is not only seen as the fruits of PAR, but it is seen more importantly in the process of research and knowledge production itself. As Kincheloe argues, "The promotion of social justice is not devoted only to the consequences of such research but the means by which it is undertaken."[339] The practice of research is in itself already one of the "actions" in PAR – the work for justice is not only the result of the research practice, but the work of justice is how PAR engages the community in its realities. In its research process, PAR pays close attention to the dynamics of inclusion, power, agency, and community ensuring that the method used is just. Hence, PAR plays close attention to the dynamics of inclusion and agency in the research process.[340]

[338] Lykes and Mallona, 110.
[339] Kincheloe, 109.
[340] Kincheloe, 109.

What kind of change arises from the PAR process in both its methods and fruits? The hope is that this change comes from a deep solidarity with the researchers and the community involved. Andrea Dyrness argues from her critical Latina feminist lens that PAR "expands our vision of the kinds of changes research can support, drawing on the agency and cultural resources of local actors and their own strategies for making change. In doing so, it disrupts essentializing views of social change movements and activist research methods that leave change in the hands of specially trained 'experts.'"[341] Instead of change being done on behalf of the community by researchers, PAR emphasizes that community members are the agents of change themselves.

It is helpful to note here that action research is a material-discursive practice. Instead of representationalist research that speaks *about* reality, research is understood here more in terms of embodied practices wherein bodies are entangled with one another and the world. A material-discursive practice, as discussed in the previous chapter, shows how meaning-making takes place not only in the social sphere where people speak about issues, but meaning is made as embodied community members interact with their realities through action.

This section argues that PAR expands the methodological imagination as it reconfigures the practice of research in a way that taps local knowledges, regards community members as co-researchers oriented toward justice not only in the fruits of the process but also in the way that it is carried out. With these three themes, I paint an image of PAR that suggests a new way of being and doing, learning alongside one another while creating space for different ideas, different ways of being, different worlds to enter the dialogue.

[341] Andrea Dyrness, "Research for Change versus Research as Change: Lessons from a *Mujerista* Participatory Research Team," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 39/1 (2008): 24.

II. Hearing the Third Voice: Participatory Action Research as Dialogue

The previous section establishes that PAR is a way of facilitating or doing research that engages local knowledges, creates spaces for participation, and is oriented towards just action. What these three characteristics have in common is the dialogical quality of PAR wherein an opportunity arises for participants to encounter and learn with one another, an opportunity for something new to arise in the encounter. This section aims to delve deeper into the dialogical modality of PAR. What can the practice of PAR teach about dialogue? What kind of dialogue arises in the doing of PAR?

Throughout the dissertation so far, dialogue has been a recurring theme that has cut across these chapters. Synodality is a way of doing dialogue wherein church communities listen to the Spirit and to each other, listening to how the Spirit guides the church today. Critical pedagogy reimagines education as dialogue – a material-discursive practice of creating spaces of encounter, listening, and collective action; a practice that interrogates why voices are being silenced and encourages participants to name and transform their realities together. Dialogue is a crucial element of PAR as well, and there's something to learn from this practice of co-constructing knowledge together in the practice of research.

I argue that PAR is a practice of dialogue wherein participants come together to critically interrogate their everyday experiences in ways that challenge ideologies and ground their knowing in their embodied selves, a practice wherein a "third voice" arises out of listening and encountering differing perspectives. This section has three movements. The first looks back at Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, specifically how he has thought about education as dialogue. He asserts that dialogue is not merely an exchange of ideas, but an encounter. Freire's notion of dialogue as encounter, in conversation with Raimon Panikkar's theology of dialogue, will be

important foundations in this discussion on PAR. The second movement discusses how PAR is a dialogical relationality. In the example of Brinton Lykes' PAR projects in Guatemala, PAR is seen as a way of co-constructing knowledge and a creation of critically reflexive relationships wherein participants practice different ways of being with each other and their contexts. The final movement concludes this section by looking at the fruits of the PAR process – a "third voice," as Lykes and here South African colleagues call it, arises from PAR, a voice that resounds from the different voices in dialogue with one another.

A. Critical Pedagogy and Dialogue

As mentioned above, PAR advocates in the 1960s and 70s recognized the centrality of Paulo Freire's praxis of critical consciousness in their own work. The influence of Freire on PAR can still be seen in the method of PAR and in the many contemporary articulations of PAR How does Freire see dialogue in his critical pedagogy? And what have PAR practitioners found useful from Freire's work? A common way of understanding dialogue is that it is an exchange of ideas, a conversation among people, and even sometimes a debate wherein opposing parties discuss a topic and its different nuances to come up with a resolution to the tension.[342] However, dialogue, according to Freire's critical pedagogy, is seen rather as a way of being that highlights encounter. Freire construes dialogue as "the encounter between men [sic.], mediated by the world, in order to name the world."[343] Dialogue is seen as part of the nexus of action-reflection-praxis that he develops in his works, and it is central in his reimagining of critical pedagogy – "There is no true

[342] This way of understanding dialogue has been discussed by Paulo Freire, Raimon Panikkar, and other proponents of critical pedagogy. The developments in interreligious dialogue also make this nuance – wherein they criticize the usual notion of dialogue as an exchange of theological ideas, in contrast to the different ways of dialogue that they end up proposing.
[343] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 88.

word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world."[344] Dialogue is also understood in the field of interreligious dialogue as an encounter that goes beyond dialectical thinking. The theologian Raimon Panikkar argued that dialogue is a method "for the encounter of persons and not just individuals, on the one hand, or mere doctrines on the other."[345] This makes possible a way of thinking and being about the world that goes beyond dialectical thinking and foregrounds the aspect of dialogue as an encounter of persons and not just ideas. These are valuable foundations from critical pedagogy that provide the building blocks to understanding PAR as dialogical relationality. Dialogue is an encounter where participants name the world together, transform reality in their shared becoming, and expand the horizons of a community's thinking-being-doing.

Freire

As established in the previous chapter on critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire is deeply convinced that education can be reimagined as a practice of freedom. In contrast to what he calls "banking education," Freire suggests a "problem-posing" education that reconfigures the relationship of the teacher and the student, and in turn, redefines the practice of education. The banking model sees students as depositories of knowledge wherein they listen carefully and learn from their teacher only to regurgitate the information they learn. Problem-posing education, on the other hand, involves the students in "problematizing" their realities – naming their realities, understanding these realities, and acting together with a new consciousness in transforming their realities. "One of the major tasks of problem-posing education," Antonia Darder explains, "is to effectively tap into the existing knowledge and hidden strengths of students' lived histories and

[344] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 87.
[345] Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999), 27.

cultural experiences, in the process of their critical development."[346] In this sense, Freire's critical pedagogy is deeply dialogical as it engages the local knowledges of the students in the context of their realities. As Darder further argues,

> It is virtually impossible to speak of a revolutionary practice of problem-posing education outside the dialogical process, since dialogue is truly the cornerstone of Freire's pedagogy of love. A central concept of emancipatory education then is an understanding of transformative dialogue as the pedagogical practice of critical reflection and action. Such dialogue cultivates and nurtures students' curiosity and imagination toward a greater critical capacity to confront dialectically the content of their study and the task of constructing new knowledge. This process of problem-posing serves to enliven, motivate, and reinforce creativity and the "emergence of critical consciousness" in the learning process, as students grapple critically to better understand the past, present, and future in making sense of the world.[347]

Freire's way of education is a process of co-constructing knowledge together, with the hope of an emergence of a critical consciousness (a process that he calls conscientization) – a consciousness that facilitates the students' understanding of themselves and their realities, as well as their capabilities in transforming reality. A big part of Freire's model of dialogue is his engagement with local knowledge that stands in stark contrast with hegemonic epistemologies that have monopolized education for the longest time (as discussed in the first section of this chapter). Instead of a banking education that just deposits dominant ways of knowing, Freire's problem-posing education engages with the local knowledges of the people involved in education – an opening for learning with one another and listening to different voices and perspectives.

Dialogue is a decolonizing tool for Freire. Darder explains that in contrast to the banking model of education, Freire gives dialogue a central role in conscientization: "dialogue represents a powerful and transformative decolonizing process of political interaction between people."[348]

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[346] Antonia Darder, *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love,* Second Ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 90.
[347] Darder, 90-91.
[348] Darder, 92.

As a decolonizing tool, dialogue builds relationships that facilitate students tapping into their local knowledges, reflecting on what they know and their experiences. In this way, Freire's decolonizing pedagogy attempts to center local knowledge and capacitating voices with the orientation of liberating each other in the context of various oppressions:

> Through dialogical relationships, students learn to build learning communities in which they freely give voice to their thoughts, ideas, and perceptions about what they know and what they are attempting to understand, always within the context of a larger decolonizing project of emancipation.[349]

In the context of the larger decolonizing project of emancipation, what lies at the center is critical pedagogy's attention to local knowledges, and the roles of the teachers and students in this project. "The dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom," Freire argues, "does not begin when the teacher-student meets with the students-teachers in a pedagogical situation, but rather when the former first asks herself or himself what she or he will dialogue with the latter about."[350] Dialogue is "not a 'free space' where you may do what you want"[351] nor is it a space wherein "revolutionary leaders…go to the people in order to bring them a message of 'salvation."[352] Rather, dialogue "takes place inside some kind of program and context. These conditioning factors create tension in achieving goals….to achieve the goals of transformation, dialogue implies responsibility, directiveness, determination, discipline, objectives."[353] With the teacher creating the space for dialogue together with the students, they can together build relationships that engage and critically examine the local knowledges of those involved. "Dialogue is a collaborative phenomenon," Darder explains, "with an underlying purpose of

[349] Darder, 92.
[350] Freire, 93. Freire's use of the terms "teacher-student" and "students-teachers" was his attempt to blur the lines between teacher and learner in a dialogical situation.
[351] Ira Shor and Paulo Freire, *A Pedagogy for Liberation* (Washington DC: Bergin & Garvey, 1987), 102.
[352] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 95.
[353] Shor and Freire, 102.

building community through participants who focus communally on critical engagements of similar, differing, and contradictory perspectives, in order to discover ways to understand the world together and forge collective social action in the interest of democratic life."[354]

Darder explains that what happens in the dialogue is an unraveling of "the domesticating passivity and dependence conditioned by the epistemicidal tradition of banking education"[355] and for the students, a recognition "that their voices and participation are politically powerful resources that can be collectively generated in the interest of social justice, human rights and economic democracy."[356] An educational program that takes the form of dialogue works with local knowledges in an attempt to understand "the various levels of perception of themselves and of the world in which and with which they exist."[357] An educational program that does not tap into the local knowledges of the students/participants fails –and is a form of epistemic violence. Critical pedagogy, then, configures education as a practice of dialogue which is a collaborative exercise that establishes relationships, centers local knowledges, examines structures that silence voices, and capacitates those voices to participate in public life.

Panikkar

In addition to Freire's understanding of dialogue, Raimon Panikkar also offers a useful framework that can expand the practice of dialogue in PAR. Panikkar is a theologian whose work in interreligious and intercultural dialogue has certainly made an impact not only in the field of theology but also in educational and cultural studies. Growing up at the intersection of different religions and cultures has informed his own theology and the way he understands dialogue. Similar to Freire, Panikkar sees dialogue as an encounter – a meeting not only of ideas,

[354] Darder, 93.
[355] Darder, 96.
[356] Darder, 94.
[357] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 95.

but a meeting of people. Panikkar argues for a dialogical dialogue that goes beyond dialectics and locates this in a cosmotheandric vision of reality.

The point of departure for Panikkar is his intention to overcome "monistic and dualistic"[358] answers to the situation of a pluralistic and multicultural world. He distinguishes between two types of dialogue: the dialectical and the dialogical. The dialectical has marked much of Western philosophy, characterized by philosophical dispute that "[discriminates] between truth and error by means of thinking"[359] and described by Hegel as "the scientific application of the inner structure inherent in the nature of thinking."[360] For Panikkar, he sees dialectics as a rational practice that aims to overcome contradictions among ideas for a better understanding of reality,[361] with the intention of persuading the other person to what the speaker considers right.[362]

In contrast to dialectical dialogue, dialogical dialogue is a more expansive notion of dialogue that is an encounter more than a disputation of ideas, which Panikkar deems more appropriate for interreligious dialogue:

> A christian cannot assume at the outset that he knows what a buddhist means when speaking about *nirvana* and *anatman*, just as a buddhist cannot immediately be expected to understand what a christian means by God and Christ before that have encountered not just the concepts but their living contexts, which include different ways of looking at reality: They have to encounter each other before any meeting of doctrines. This is what the dialogical dialogue purports to be: the method for the encounter of persons and not just individuals, on the one hand, or mere doctrines on the other.[363]

[358] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue,* 24.
[359] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue,* 27.
[360] The quote above is how Panikkar translates Hegel's description of dialectics: *"die wissenschaftliche Anwnedung der in der Natur des Denkens liegenden Gesetzmässigkeit."* In Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 27.
[361] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue,* 32.
[362] Zaida Espinosa Zarate, "Epistemological Foundations of Intercultural Education: Contributions from Raimon Panikkar," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 42 (2023): 509.
[363] Pannikar, *Intrareligious Dialogue,* 27.

The dialogical dialogue is a dialogue that is more about the subjects engaged in the dialogue more than the ideas that are being discussed.[364] In this encounter of subjects, the whole person is encountered by another and instead of merely being a rhetorical activity that disputes ideas, dialogue is expanded to also engage with the ethos and the pathos of those involved.[365] "This encounter," Zaida Zarate explains, "consists in the *experience* of the other person's otherness, of her being *together with* – and not just *in front of* – the subject…. It is the concrete manifestation of the human *relational* identity, embodied in a particular experience."[366] Dialogue is not merely a meeting of ideas that attempt to overcome internal contradictions, but it is an encounter with people – not to convert or to dominate, but to trust, to understand, listen, to be changed. In this sense, dialogue is not merely a "crossing of two monologues,"[367] but

> It is a matter of going beyond the level of the dialectic of ideas where competition dominates and victory belongs to the strongest, in order to arrive at an *open welcoming dialogue* where the otherness of communion may be brought into relief: to love one's neighbor as one's self means to love him as he is, as someone different and valuable, without trying to convert him to my ideas[368]

In arguing for a dialogical dialogue, Panikkar does not necessarily replace the dialectical method but guards against what he calls a dialectical totalitarianism:

> The dialogical dialogue is a method that both limits the field of dialectics and complements it. It *limits* dialectics, insofar as it prevents dialectics from becoming logical monism, by putting forward another method that does not assume the exclusively dialectical nature of reality. It *complements* dialectics by the same token. It is not a direct critique of dialectics, but only a guard against dialectical totalitarianism.[369]

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[364] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue,* 29-30.
[365] Zarate, 510.
[366] Zarate, 510.
[367] Raimon Panikkar, "¿Mística comparada?", en VVAA *La mística en el siglo XXI,* Madrid 2002 in Raimon Panikkar Official Website, accessed 28 March 2024, https://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/gloss-dialogical.html.
[368] Raimon Panikkar, "Dialogical dialogue or dialogal dialogue," in Raimon Panikkar Official Website, accessed 28 March 2024, https://www.raimon-panikkar.org/english/gloss-dialogical.html.
[369] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue,* 26.

As an expansion of the framework of dialogue, it includes a more expansive view of human existence that does not only engage ideas but the totality of the person engaging one's world.

The dialogical dialogue is based upon Panikkar's own cosmovision which he calls his cosmotheandric vision. In articulating his vision, Panikkar engages with a vision of how interconnected the whole of reality is and that all are involved in reality that "is not given once and for all, but…continually creating itself – and not just unfolding from already existing premises or starting points."[370] The dialogical dialogue assumes the radical dynamism of reality described above, and those participating in dialogue are not just talking *about* reality but are instead participating in the continual creation of the universe. Thinking is not seen as separated from being, but in dialogue, they're integrated with each other. The cosmotheandric vision of Panikkar is an important acknowledgement that dialogue engages with cosmovisions and is a practice that participates in the unfolding of the universe – a point that will be demonstrated later on with the work of Brinton Lykes and the Maya Ixil women in Guatemala.

Along with the dialogical framework of critical pedagogy as encounter, the dialogical dialogue of Panikkar adds to how dialogue is practiced. Dialogical dialogue is an encounter, not merely of ideas but of different beings, a participation in the unfolding of reality.

B. Participatory Action Research as Dialogical Relationality

Like critical pedagogy, PAR creates dialogical relationality. PAR is a practice that is centered upon building relationships and creating a dialogical space wherein participants collaborate with one another in co-constructing knowledge and transforming their realities. At the heart of PAR is dialogue grounded upon right relationships. In looking at the method of PAR, the elements of a

[370] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue,* 32.

dialogical critical pedagogy can be seen manifested in practice, such as the way relationships are built, whose voices are centered and amplified, the collaborative dimensions of educational practice, the capacitating of voices, mutual listening, and the process of conscientization. This section will further examine these elements and see how these can play out in the PAR process.

To demonstrate how PAR is a dialogical relationality, this section will look at the participatory action research of Brinton Lykes and the Maya Ixil women in Chajul, Guatemala. They used a host of pedagogical and analytic techniques to develop a way to do participatory action research that can serve as a resource for reconciliation and community change in a post-conflict society.[371] They used PhotoVoice as a primary tool for gathering stories and analyzing themes that were identified by the women at the start of the process. In taking their own photos, the participants bring to the fore what is important to them and in their participation in analyzing photos and stories, the women bring with them their wisdom as they try to make meaning and establish life in the wake of *la violencia*.[372]

The research they have done together centered the women's voices in an attempt to document the women's resistance and resilience in a post-conflict situation.[373] The process was intensely participatory and dialogical. Using PhotoVoice, the researchers who facilitated and initiated the research engaged the local knowledge of the women and together they co-

[371] Asociación de la Mujer Maya Ixil and M. Brinton Lykes, *Voices and Images: Mayan Ixil Women of Chajul* (Chajul: ADMI, 2000), 16-18.
[372] *La violencia* is the 36-year armed conflict in Guatemala in the 1970s and 80s that involved "massacres, the scorching of villages, disappearances, and widespread displacement and exile" in rural communities, such as Chajul in the Ixil area of Guatemala. Cf. The introduction of M. Brinton Lykes and AMDI, *Voices and images: Mayan Ixil women of Chajul* (Chajul: ADMI, 2000).
[373] Lykes was discussing in one of her articles how in designing the PAR project, they were moving away from a "damage-centered" approach and towards a "desire-centered" research. Instead of painting the women merely as victims of violence, they focus on their resistance and resilience in the wake of violence in how they make meaning of their memories, but also how they build a life post-conflict. Cf. M. Brinton Lykes and Gabriela Tavara, "Feminist Participatory Action Research: Cocunstructing Liberation Psychological Praxis Through Dialogic Relationality and Critical Reflexivity" in *Liberation Psychology,* Lillian Comas-Diaz and Edil Torres Rivera, eds (American Psychological Association, 2020).

constructed new knowledge and new practices: "the content documented through the workshops was neither theirs nor ours, but rather a co-construction or mosaic of understandings that centers Mayan women's knowledge."[374]

1. Coming from Different Places: Establishing Dialogical Relationships

A big part of establishing a dialogical practice is acknowledging that participants of the dialogue come from different places – different social locations, identities, and socio-cultural contexts. As PAR attempts to build relationships among researchers and participants, Lykes argues for the importance of being aware of systems of oppression or privilege that "constrain and facilitate diverse ways of engagement."[375] Critical self-reflexivity is key at the onset of the PAR process – to be aware of the different overlapping identities that people bring to the field and to interrogate the power dynamics at play so that the PAR process can become a research that is just.

The way a researcher enters a community and establishes relationships affect how the research will go and how each perceives the other. The sociologist Shulamit Reinharz reflects on the identity that researchers have while conducting fieldwork. Reinharz proposes that researchers "both bring the self to the field and create the self in the field. The self we create in the field is a product of the norms of the social setting and the ways in which the 'research subjects' interact with the selves the researchers brings to the field."[376] This reflection on the different selves in the field is a departure from previous notions in more dominant positivist research that sees the role of the researcher as a "fly on the wall," purely objective observer that does not form any

[374] M. Brinton Lykes and Gabriela Tavara, "Feminist Participatory Action Research: Cocunstructing Liberation Psychological Praxis Through Dialogic Relationality and Critical Reflexivity" in *Liberation Psychology,* Lillian Comas-Diaz and Edil Torres Rivera, eds (American Psychological Association, 2020), 122.
[375] Lykes and Tavara, 120.
[376] Shulamit Reinharz, "Who Am I? The Need for a Variety of Selves in the Field" in *Reflexivity & Voice,* Rosanna Hertz, ed. (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), 3.

relationship with the community whatsoever. Problematizing identities, fieldwork then stands at the tension where researchers' study of the community meets and clashes with the community's perception of the researchers.[377] In this framework, there is now more emphasis on "what the researcher became in the field [and] how the field revealed itself to the researcher."[378] This dynamic framework emphasizes a more relational way of research – what is being established at the onset of research are relationships, a collaborative process of becoming where learning, research, and change goes both ways. The researcher is not a purely "objective" observer and can be changed and the community are not merely "research subjects" but are co-researchers in the process.

As a researcher from the Global North, Lykes has been challenged to critically and reflexively interrogate her own positionality, privileges and benefits from the hegemonic knowledge systems in which she was educated vis-à-vis her relationships and embodied praxis with the participants and co-researchers in the PAR processes.[379] Critical reflexivity is central in Lykes' feminist PAR. She describes it as "a means through which researchers can deconstruct and then reconstruct their actions and knowledge generation."[380] It pays close and critical attention to her privileges that create epistemological and methodological challenges in research. Given these challenges, "we have examined our situated subjectivities and engaged collaboratively with [local] intermediaries alongside protagonists in accompanying their actions and in inviting them into parallel processes of reflexivity about their praxis."[381]

[377] Reinharz, 4.
[378] Reinharz, 4.
[379] Lykes and Tavara, 122.
[380] Alison Crosby and M. Brinton Lykes, *Beyond Repair? Mayan Women's Protagonism in the Aftermath of Genocidal Harm* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 19.
[381] Crosby and Lykes, 20.

Lykes was invited to Chajul for the first time in 1992, where she "initially served as a consultant on organizational and economic development projects and a facilitator of psychosocial workshops for a local Maya women's NGO which had formed that year."[382] In developing programs for widows, orphans, and displaced families, Lykes worked with the organization, bringing in her expertise as a community-cultural psychologist. She recounts that she was invited by a friend hoping that she could "facilitate a series of creative participatory workshops, similar to those [she has] been coordinating with rural community-based health promoters during the Guatemalan armed conflict.[383] Lykes was invited to Chajul for her expertise, but in Lykes' continued engagement with the community, they established relationships that created the possibility of different kinds of collaborative work to happen. Take for example this narrative from Lykes in the earlier parts of their relationship:

> Some of the women of Chajul wanted to build a corn mill. When I tried to explain that I was a psychologist, not a development worker, they noted that the corn mill was a "mental health project." Over many months and multiple visits, I facilitated creative workshops through which they re-presented their everyday lives through drawings, collages, dramatizations, image theater, and creative storytelling, and together we crafted a journey through which I learned that building and running a corn mill was indeed "good for their mental health." Little by little, I understood how the centrality of corn to their material and symbolic well-being, as well as the processes through which they demonstrated that they could care for their children, contributed to their self-esteem, healing, and overall well-being.[384]

The case of the corn mill demonstrates a two-way research process wherein researchers and participants can learn with one another and be in solidarity with one another. Lykes reflects on her positionality and her initial impressions as she first went into Chajul:

> We all too often engaged in these [feminist] PAR processes from a stance that seems to have presumed that we were 'conscientized' while the Indigenous women with whom we were partnering were not and that our challenge was to facilitate processes

[382] M. Brinton Lykes "Silence(ing), voice(s) and gross violations of human rights: constituting and performing subjectivities through PhotoPAR," *Visual Studies* 25/3 (2010): 240. Henceforth referred to as Lykes, "Silence(ing)."
[383] Lykes and Tavara, 115-116.
[384] Lykes and Tavara, 116.

> through which they deideologized their lived experiences to achieve critical consciousness.[385]

In this relationship, many identities crisscross with one another and the research becomes a dialogical practice where many perspectives meet. Reinharz' multiple selves come to the fore – Lykes entered the community with the community hoping that her expertise could be of use in their situation (a self that was brought to the field), but there was also a self that was created in the field in the encounter of the researcher with the community – a possibility of change, not only for the community and their situation, but also for the researcher and her frameworks to also be challenged and renewed. In an article written years after her engagement with the community, Lykes mentioned how her encounter has challenged her previous homogenous image of Mayan women (there were many overlapping identities within the group that affected the power dynamics in the community), and the different frameworks of thinking about a post-conflict situation.[386] The different frameworks from the West, for example, always tend to focus on the damage that was done to the community and the steps required for redress whereas a more decolonial framework focuses on the community's desires and agency.[387] In her role, Lykes saw herself as bridging different frameworks together as she also saw herself in many intersecting identities: "My position at the crossroads of activist scholarship and human rights advocacy and as a sister-in-solidarity sustained me for over a decade of collaborative work in this rural Mayan community."[388] The local experiences of the community was put in conversation with discourses

[385] Lykes and Tavara, 118.
[386] Cf. M. Brinton Lykes and Gabriela Tavara, "Feminist Participatory Action Research: Cocunstructing Liberation Psychological Praxis Through Dialogic Relationality and Critical Reflexivity" in *Liberation Psychology,* Lillian Comas-Diaz and Edil Torres Rivera, eds (American Psychological Association, 2020),
[387] Cf. Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79/3 (2009) 409-427.
[388] Lykes, "Silence(ing)," 251.

on human rights and psychology as both Lykes and the community push forward together in reimagining what it means to live in post-conflict Guatemala.

2. Dialogue as Co-Constructing Knowledge and Practices

This is also the context in which Lykes suggested the use of PhotoVoice as a way to address the concerns of a community in post-conflict Guatemala. PhotoVoice is a process wherein "local communities have sought to influence social change through visual documentation of a wide range of inequalities."[389] Twenty out of the more than one hundred in the organization that Lykes worked with participated in taking pictures, selected photos to discuss in group analyses, and told a collective story based on the photos and the narratives collected. Lykes narrates the process:

> Each woman was given a point-and-shoot camera. In initial workshops we practiced using the cameras, role-played ethical dilemmas in 'taking pictures,' and discussed strengths and limitations of formal versus spontaneous photography. Each woman then took 24 photographs per month, focusing on themes that we were identifying through participatory exercises. After each roll was developed and returned to the photographer, she picked 4-6 pictures that she 'liked' or that she thought 'best represented the month's theme,' and recounted a story about each picture. The stories ranged from verbatim accounts of what the pictured person had recounted to the photographer's story about taking the picture or her memories of experiences 'similar' to those she had depicted in the photograph. These stories were transcribed and yoked to the relevant picture. I or one of the other internationalist collaborators facilitated workshops wherein Maya women selected photovoices and divided into small groups where a second level of analysis developed…. Finally, the participants in the small groups shared their hopes or wishes for the future. The original photovoice and texts transcribed from these small-group photo-elicitation processes were the core of the final 56 photonarratives that were published in Voices and Images of Maya Ixil Women.[390]

The process that Lykes described above demonstrates the active participation of the women throughout the PAR process. From deciding themes, to collecting data by taking pictures, to

[389] Lykes "Silence(ing)," 240. Lykes cites the work of Wang and Burris and the Women of Yunnan Province, *Visual Voices: 100 photographs of village China by women of Yunnan Province* (Yunnan: Yunnan People's Publishing House, 1995).
[390] Lykes, "Silence(ing), 241.

talking about the narratives in group analyses, and in the final curation of the photos and narratives, the process involved the participants who became co-researchers and was facilitated by the "outsider" researchers. In the process, the participants/co-researchers "documented human rights violations in their own words and images," while practicing and embodying "new subjectivities as photographers, oral historians, bookkeepers, project coordinators…. Maya co-researchers thus embodied and performed their rights as indigenous women."[391] What happens in PhotoVoice are layered decision-making processes wherein "power was performed and contested by multiple participants."[392]

In the process, Lykes was tapping into the local knowledge of the Maya women while also tapping into their new subjectivities. In other words, the practice of PAR is a co-construction of new knowledges and practices. Lykes and the Maya Ixil women worked together in co-constructing, in their own words, a documentation of human rights violations and how the community is living in the aftermath of la violencia. In this co-construction and the centering of local knowledge, PAR acknowledges that knowledge is situated. All knowing "emerges from a particular subject position and is, therefore partial or situated. People engage with each other from diverse stances, creating new meanings and knowledges through their interactions."[393] As the women dispersed and took photographs, they engaged different local knowledges. In group analyses where they talked about and chose photos they thought resonated with the theme, new knowledge was being co-constructed by the women together. Even Lykes and the other researchers took part in this co-construction as they not only capacitated the women's skills for photography and narration, but they also created space for the process to happen.

[391] Lykes, "Silence(ing)," 241.
[392] Lykes, "Silence(ing)," 241.
[393] Lykes and Tavara, 122.

In a deeper analysis of the process, the PAR that Lykes facilitated was very much influenced by the liberation psychology of Ignacio Martín-Baró who saw it as crucial to ground psychological knowledge in "historical memory, processes through which local communities and those who accompany them develop new ways of knowing that are grounded in past experiences as well as in the communities' previously suppressed but now recovered knowledges."[394] In tapping into their local knowledges and awakening new subjectivities, suppressed communal memories are being recovered. The use of PhotoVoice is a crucial contrast between Maya Ixil women only being photographed in postcards and the women now taking the cameras into their own hands to photograph and make their perspectives known. Instead of a "voiceover" by other narrators, women's voices are now being heard as the narrators of their own photos and lives. The historical memory of la violencia is retold in light of this new subjectivity. Furthermore, listening intently to local knowledges, one can see the cosmovisions that are operant in the meaning-making of the community. In the case of Mayan women's resilience, the Mayan cosmovision and other healing processes are central in how the women articulated their own visions of resilience, healing, and life in a post-conflict society.[395]

3. Dialogical Relationality

In the PAR process of Lykes and the Maya Ixil women, dialogical relationality is seen not just as a function of PAR, but is a necessary modality of this kind of process. Dialogical relationality is a central element of how PAR reimagines the work of research. In contrast to a top-down, positivist kind of research, PAR takes on an a more iterative and co-constructive process that

[394] Lykes and Tavara, 114-115.
[395] This is documented well in Lykes, Crosby, Alvarez Medrano, "Redressing Injustice, Reframing Resilience: Mayan Women's Persistence and Protagonism as Resistance" in *Resilience, Adaptive Peacebuilding, and Transitional Justice*, J. Clark and M. Ungar, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 210-233.

engages the subjectivities of the participants and aims for a deeper engagement with people's local knowledges and praxis. From the case above, PAR shows that meaning-making is a dialogical endeavor and that conscientization is a dialogical process grounded in robust relationships.

Meaning-making has a dialogical nature, as seen from the nature of knowledge itself as being situated. Each participant brought their own situated knowledge(s) to the PAR process. "Neither were homogenous groups of women," Lykes claims, "but rather individuals who while sharing cultural, ethnic, and linguistic identities and deeply communitarian in daily praxis, had different lived experiences; positioned themselves differently…and frequently had differing opinions about the experiences being discussed."[396] PAR assumes the contextual nature of knowledge and engages with it in how it taps local knowledges. The PAR process takes it a step further – the local knowledges that are tapped are not only identified and highlighted, but they are put into conversation with different kinds of local knowledges (even knowledges and expertise from mainstream discourses and disciplines). As Lykes asserts, "people engage with each other from diverse stances, creating new meanings and knowledge(s) through their interactions."[397] The encounter among differences creates the new; the co-construction of knowledge and practice is seen as a practice of dialogue among differences.

Furthermore, truth-telling and the pursuit for justice are also seen as having a dialogical nature. And in the context of a post-conflict Guatemala, the research that Lykes has done with the community of Maya Ixil women has expressed new images and visions of what healing and reparations look like that the usual discourse on human rights and transitional justice in the West do not quite capture. In tapping local knowledges, Lykes also tapped into the people's historical

[396] Lykes and Tavara, 122.
[397] Lykes and Tavara, 122.

memories that were systemically suppressed by social structures that have caused historical and epistemic violence in the aftermath of conflict.[398] Aside from recovering historical memory, Lykes was also tapping into the cosmovisions that are operative in the narratives and practices of the Maya Ixil women. While the Mayan cosmovision is diverse among the twenty-two linguistically different Mayan peoples in Guatemala, they all have a similar "core onto-epistemology of complementarity and equilibrium, whereby knowing and being are inextricably intertwined, and the relationship between human beings and Mother Earth is mutually constituting and interdependent."[399] Part of the healing that takes place after is also the healing of the land and the healing of the spirit that form an integral whole – these can be seen in the narratives from the PhotoVoice project.

Finally, the PAR process makes it clear that conscientization happens through dialogue. Citing Ignacio Martín-Baró, Lykes argues that "conscientization is not a state of being" (not a state to be achieved at the end of a process), "but a dialectical process."[400] Conscientization is the process itself – a dialogical process that makes participants aware of their realities and their capabilities in transforming those realities moving forward. PAR is not just research for justice, but it is a practice of justice in itself, done in the modality of dialogue and relationship.

C. The Third Voice

What arises from the PAR process is what Lykes calls a "third voice." She recounts that the "results from our FPAR praxis are neither a transparent representation of communities' understandings nor our sole authored interpretations of a social reality….Rather, they can be

[398] Lykes and Tavara, 114-115.
[399] Lykes, Crosby, and Medrano, 215.
[400] Lykes and Tavara, 120.

described as a third voice, an interplay of multiple understandings where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."[401] The third voice arises from the different local knowledges that are situated in varied contexts and the encounter of these voices in dialogical relationship.

The third voice, then, arises from a polyvalence of voices and perspectives, which lends itself to complexities of power and agency. Take a look at one of the photos in the PhotoVoice project in Chajul. Ana Maria took a photo of a site with several crosses and told the following story:

> In the village of Juil, I went to take a picture. We can see the altar of the Mayan priests which our ancestors built. But you can also still see that there are several crosses. Before there was a house over the altar but today it does not exist because it was burned to the ground by the soldiers in 1982.[402]

Figure 1. "Rebuilding a ceremonial site"[403]

[401] Lykes and Tavara, 126.
[402] M. Brinton Lykes, "Individual stories, PhotoVoice," unpublished documents (Chajul: September 1998) in Lykes, "Silence(ing)," 244.
[403] Photo published in M. Brinton Lykes "Silence(ing), voice(s) and gross violations of human rights: constituting and performing subjectivities through PhotoPAR," *Visual Studies* 25/3 (2010): 245.

After six months, Ana Maria was joined by two other women and together they analyzed the photo with the participatory method described by Lykes. There were similarities from the story of the original photographer, but the group analysis differs from Ana Maria's narrative, as seen below:

> In the past, the ancestors were content to practice their costumbres[404]…There was a house and many believers came…with candles, incense, cuxa, and sugar and conducted sacrifices and celebrations with big festivals… with alcohol and food, that is with costumbres that were very celebratory and included fireworks, etc…. This was what our ancestors believed but today this is no longer practiced. But it was because of the violence that there was so much war and it was because of that that the people took up other kinds of religions and other beliefs about God.[405]

Two striking differences are the emphasis on the costumbres that the ancestors practiced before that are no longer practiced today and the abrupt disappearance of the house that was burned by the soldiers in 1982. In Lykes' notes, she also references an additional interpretation about the children in the photo from the group analysis: "We hope that the costumbres will never disappear and that our children will learn these beliefs and the costumbres of our ancestors."[406] The final iteration of the narrative (made by the even larger group) that made it to the final book is as follows:

> Previously the people practiced these religious rites: they burned copal, candles, incense, cuxa, sugar. . . . Many people used to go to the oratory in Juil where the Mayan priests came to perform ceremonies. Juil was an Ixil king when the Spaniards arrived, and this site was a ceremonial center and Mayan temple. The people who made a pilgrimage to Chajul visited Juil with candles and incense on the second Friday of Lent.
>
> . . . But in the time of la violencia, this is the place where the army captured and hanged many campesinos when they came off their lands after work. In 1981 the

[404] Lykes defines a "costumbre" as "a custom or tradition; refers to a complex set of Mayan rituals (often with Catholic syncretic elements) and lifestyle whose usage is an important part of defining a "traditional Maya" in Lykes, "Silence(ing)," 252.
[405] M. Brinton Lykes, "Memoria [memory] group meetings," unpublished documents, (Chajul: August-November 1998) in Lykes, "Silence(ing)," 244.
[406] M. Brinton Lykes, "Memoria [memory] group meetings," unpublished documents, (Chajul: August-November 1998) in Lykes, "Silence(ing)," 245.

> army burned down the house of the crosses, the ceremonial center of Juil. Thus the army repressed the people and tried to destroy their religious rites.
>
> That's why the people adopted other religions. . . .
>
> Before, the ladinos discriminated a lot against the indigenous people, but now we have our rights, we can defend ourselves. We have to respect ourselves and be who we are. We should never change our traje, languages, or identity. If we work for our community, then there will be many changes. We have to fight for our people to improve our future.[407]

Lykes notes that the first narrative of Ana Maria "represents less than 20% of the final photonarrative. The latter includes themes that synthesize and extend both Ana Maria's analysis and that of the small group."[408] In the weaving and reweaving of narratives, there were themes that resonated with the larger group in the PhotoVoice process. The historic memory of the campesinos murdered in that site by soldiers during la violencia was previously suppressed in the earlier narratives and is now given voice in the final narrative. The religious practices and beliefs of the ancestors provide guiding values for the community's identity as they strive to fight for their people and improve their future. The third voice arises from the resonances that come from a process of listening and seeing the different narratives being woven in different moments in the process. Through the narrative, the individual person "speaks not only for herself but speaks for [and with] the whole community."[409]

Lykes notes the complexities of articulating the third voice. While the goal of co-construction is seen in the participatory process of interpreting photos and reweaving narratives (giving rise to the new subjectivities described above), the process also conceals "some of the contradictory discourses and the religiously and ethnically diverse subjectivities of Maya women

[407] Women of PhotoVoice/ADMI and Lykes, *Voces e Imagenes: Mujeres Mayas Ixiles de Chajul/Voices and Images: Mayan Ixil Women of Chajul* (Guatemala: Magna Terra, 2000), 42.
[408] Lykes, "Silence(ing)," 246.
[409] Lykes, "Silence(ing)," 250.

of Chajul."[410] This is one of the limitations and a problem that the PAR process encounters as it produces a third voice. The writing out or the silencing of different narratives in favor of a collective narrative must be avoided and the different perspectives have to engaged more intentionally.[411] However, Lykes says that in contrast to other testimonios at the time that were individually constructed, the testimonio that was produced together in the PhotoVoice project was "co-constructed by multiple local women and 'outsider' co-researchers, and is thus a polyvocal composite through which multiple voices are raised and subjectivities performed."[412] Even though the final narrative was not a direct reflection of Ana Maria's narrative, it is an expression of the "newly constituted subjectivities of twenty-first-century Maya Ixil women" born out of their resonances with the original text and a process wherein they learned through diffraction.

The concept of the third voice, being a polyvocal composite, "posits that what is produced through accompaniment processes within circulations of power that privilege some voices and marginalize others is neither exclusively the voice of the privileged committed to decolonizing their privilege nor of the marginalized who dare to break the silence, but is rather a dialogic co-construction."[413] The collaboration between those involved create new knowledge – an interplay of multiple local knowledges where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The third voice then is seen not in one or the other, but in the meeting of multiple voices and perspectives.

The third voice, the polyvocal composite, or what I would call the resonant voice, is an important element in the pedagogy being proposed in this dissertation, which will be picked up

[410] Lykes, "Silence(ing)" 250.
[411] Cf. Lykes, "Silence(ing)," 250.
[412] Lykes, "Silence(ing)," 250.
[413] Crosby and Lykes, 20.

as a theme in the concluding chapter. In this chapter on PAR, the third voice bears decolonial witness as it is born from a decolonial research method that highlights the importance of dialogical relationality in its modality. Standing in opposition to dominant knowledge frameworks, PAR reimagines a new way of doing research that creates the possibility of everyone to learn with one another.

III. Towards a Conclusion: The Prospects of PAR

The method of PAR presents exciting possibilities for decolonizing research in the context of grassroots church communities in the Philippines. As the third voice arose in the PhotoVoice project in Chajul, the third voice can also emerge from different prospective PAR projects in the setting of the Philippines. Given the challenges of grassroots church communities discussed in Chapter One and the general question of this dissertation, I propose participatory action research to create more participatory spaces for grassroots church communities and to build dialogical relationships wherein communities can articulate new images and visions of what it means for a church to do justice today.

PAR is an opportunity for people to learn with one another: it creates space for the participation of the people, a practice of research not just as research for justice but research that does justice in its process. As PAR taps into local knowledges, it creates the possibility for engaging different ways of knowing that are suppressed by dominant ways of research and social structures that discourage communal historical memory. PAR could also help tap into the cosmovisions that people have that are operant in community practices and ways of knowing. The call for ecological justice and a pedagogy that upholds ecological justice can be done through a PAR process that involves the community and the environment in recognizing how

intertwined they are. The many different contexts of grassroots church communities, highlighted in the next chapters, can benefit from a method such as PAR.

In this discussion of PAR in this chapter, what can be highlighted is how learning can be done through a dialogical process. PAR expands the methodological imagination by embodying what research, what learning with one another, can become. In a deep engagement in and with the pluriverse that creates space for a third voice to arise or be generated, PAR proposes a new way to research and dialogue that enacts justice in its practice. These points will be very interesting to reflect on in a theological and religious education context. If PAR proposes dialogue as a way for people to learn with one another, how will the principles of PAR look like in a religious education setting? How can PAR be done in the context of grassroots church communities in the Philippines? How can we learn with one another for justice and peace? The next chapter will put PAR into conversation with a synodal theology and the principles of critical pedagogy. Considering these different fields of inquiry, an education for justice and peace is a practice of space making, of deep listening and encounter, wherein the third voice and the Spirit arises from dialogue. In this dialogue, participants learn through diffraction where new ways of thinking and being arise.

CHAPTER FIVE

LEARNING WITH ONE ANOTHER IN THE SPIRIT: A DECOLONIAL AND SYNODAL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The practices of grassroots church communities teach us what it means to learn with one another in a decolonial and synodal way. As seen in the various cases being presented in this dissertation, these communities bear witness to being a church that discerns the Spirit together in their everyday realities, acting together in the face of human rights abuses and various injustices. The pedagogy of resistance that is operative in their practices is not just an education *for* justice, but *is* a practice of justice in itself in the way that they create space for listening previously silenced voices, recognizing the agency of each member of the community, and capacitating those voices. In their practices, they collaborate with one another in just ways, a reimagination of how learning and teaching can be done in the context of colonial structures that continue to silence and oppress grassroots communities.

This dissertation is an exercise of learning from the experiences of these grassroots communities in how they have learned with one another. Their practices are seeds, containing within them frameworks and visions of a world that is otherwise: a vision of how learning and teaching can be done in a more just and inclusive way moving forward, a vision of an education that is a tool for liberation instead of domination, a vision of a way to do theology with the people that uses the symbols of their faith in making sense of their realities. In looking at their practices with the rich frameworks contained within them, this dissertation is also a practice of reimagining how religious education can be like in grassroots communities moving forward. This study started with a simple question, "What does a decolonial and synodal religious

education look like?" In responding to this question, this chapter will weave together the different threads found across the chapters of the dissertation to map out what this religious education looks like. And in short, a decolonial and synodal religious education is one that creates space for people to do theology together – a practice of gathering and listening to each other, interpreting the everyday in the framework of their shared faith as they discern the Spirit speaking and guiding the church in their engagement with their realities.

Religious education is a practice of space-making. As I argue in Chapter Three, education is involved in the production of space, and space is understood not only in a concrete and physical way, but also as "sets of relations between individuals and groups,"[414] which I refer to as social space. Religious education, then, is a creation or a transformation of spaces – of the social spaces between people and communities, of the material spaces that people inhabit and in which they interact – as spaces where it is possible to learn with one another. This can be seen in basic ecclesial communities when they gather: they create space with each other to engage with their everyday concerns, to dialogue with each other and discern communally as they listen to the Spirit. The task of the religious educator, then, is to facilitate the creation of these spaces where this kind of learning is possible.

Education as a practice of creating space is seen more concretely in participatory action research (PAR). As I describe in Chapter Four, PAR opens wide the pedagogical and methodological imagination as it decolonizes research and involves the people in co-producing knowledge. In this collaborative process, PAR reconfigures social space as it interrogates the dynamics of inclusion, power, and agency to ensure that all voices are heard, especially those who have been previously silenced. In doing so, PAR engages the people's knowledge, opening

[414] Marianne Larsen and Jason Beech, "Spatial Theorizing in Comparative and International Educational Research," *Comparative Education Review* 58/2 (2014), 199.

up a pluriverse of different ways of knowing and being, and through this dialogue, a "third voice" emerges. In addition to transforming social space, PAR also engages the community into a learning of place wherein people learn their relationship with the Land. PAR is a material-discursive practice wherein the people engage the reality in which they live, and recognize the larger context not just as the stage upon which they do the learning but as a co-learner in the process. In the creation and transformation of social and physical space, PAR creates the conditions for grassroots communities to learn in a dynamic and performative way.

I propose the use of PAR as a way to do a decolonial and synodal religious education. Infused with the method of PAR, a synodal religious education creates space for the people to listen to the Spirit together, mindful of the dynamics of inclusion, power, and agency that silence the people and stifle the Spirit. The use of PAR creates space to engage with local theologies, opening up a theological pluriverse where the community discerns the Spirit who speaks from many different places. PAR creates a more dynamic practice of synodality where the community present engages the everyday in mission.

In this chapter, I argue for a religious education, in the modality of PAR, that creates space. This modality of religious education creates space in three senses. First, PAR creates space for the Spirit to arise in the collaboration of all learners. As synodality is premised on the conviction that the Spirit still guides the church today and as it endeavors to listen to the Spirit in the practice of communal discernment, PAR is a practice that also listens to the "third voice" that arises in the collaboration of all learners. The "third voice" is the result of the whole participatory process – a new perspective that arises from a kind of dialogue that is not only an exchange of ideas, but a meeting and being with another. This reimagines religious education as a practice that creates the conditions for the "new" to arise in the process. Combining the

practices of PAR and synodality together. Second, PAR creates space for dialogue where all learn through diffraction. Dialogue is a key thread that cuts across all cases and frameworks being discussed in this dissertation. I understand dialogue not merely as an exchange of ideas, but as a being-with one another that creates space for different ways of knowing and being to emerge. The phenomenon of diffraction demonstrates the learning that happens in dialogue well – in the meeting of different waves, new waves emerge. In a similar way, the meeting of different perspectives and experiences create space for new ways of knowing and being to emerge. Third, PAR creates space for learners to engage local theologies grounded in the everyday. In engaging local theologies, a synodal PAR is a decolonial practice that shifts the way of being church from one that rigidly divides the teaching from a learning church towards a church that engages the authority of the everyday that is revelatory of the Spirit. In this modality, religious education is a decolonial act that creates spaces for those who were silenced to speak and for everyone to imagine a world that is otherwise.

I. Creating Space for the Spirit

What is the hope of a decolonial and synodal religious education? The religious education I am proposing in this dissertation hopes to create space for all to learn with the Spirit who guides the church until today. Using the method of PAR in the context of grassroots church communities, the hope is for a deeper listening – a listening to all the faithful and an even deeper listening to the Spirit speaking and resonating in the voices and the interior movements of the community gathered. The learning that goes on in this context is not just an echo of one voice or another, but an emergence of a "third voice" that arises from the encounters of people intentionally in dialogue.

This hope for a decolonial and synodal religious education is fleshed out further in the next two sections about creating space for dialogue and an engagement with local theologies, but for this section, I want to start with an account of this hope. Two foundational concepts ground my aspirations for religious education. The first is how synodality listens deeply to the Spirit in practices such as communal discernment and conversations in the Spirit. These practices demonstrate the dynamics of the *sensus fidei* wherein there is a learning in the Spirit through deep listening and dynamic dialogue. The second foundation is the "third voice," which is a voice that arises from the PAR process. The third voice is a new perspective that arises from a dialogue that is not merely an exchange of ideas but a meeting and being with one another.

A. Listening Deeply to the Spirit

The Spirit is at work among the people. This is a conviction that lies at the heart of the life of basic ecclesial communities and of a theology of synodality. When BECs gather together for bible study and theological reflection concerning the issues that they face as a community, their way of learning with one another is a learning in the Spirit. Communal discernment takes place, according to Francisco Claver, "when the Word of God is made to cast light on the current problems of the community."[415] The Word of God is enfleshed in the context of the community's reflections and discussions, and in turn, the Word of God brings to bear upon the transformation of their realities. In discerning together, in acting together towards an issue that they face, or even in worshipping together, the Spirit animates the community as an ecclesial community – an image of a people interacting with their God in the context of the everyday.

[415] Fransico Claver, *The Making of a Local Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), 95.

As I argued in Chapter Two, the practice of communal discernment demonstrates the interaction between God's revelation and the church discerning the Spirit in the everyday. This interaction is understood in terms of the dynamics of the *sensus fidei* which Ormond Rush argues is "the privileged means through which the Spirit whispers divine guidance to the church regarding the meaning of the Gospel in an increasingly complex world."[416] The sense of faith, taken in the communal sense, enables the church community to discern the signs of the times and animates the life of faith and guides authentic Christian action."[417] In engaging the sense of faith, the church is animated by the Spirit who continues to guide the church today in participating in the mission of Jesus Christ in the context of their varying realities of the everyday.

Furthermore, the synodal practice of conversations in the Spirit demonstrates the movement that happens in synodality. Synodality is not just a listening to each other, but more importantly, it leads to a deeper "listening to the Spirit, who is the authentic protagonist, and being sent forth in mission by Him."[418] Those involved in synodality do not just listen to each other for the sake of listening, but they enter the process with the disposition and the commitment of listening to the Spirit heard within the voices of the people and the interior movements of the community gathered. This communal practice is an intentional way of listening more deeply, of discerning more closely the Spirit in their midst. The objective of this practice is not a mere understanding of each other and the key points that were shared in the circle, but to "build a consensus of the fruits of the joint work,"[419] and move together into mission according to how the Spirit calls them to act.

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[416] Ormond Rush, "Inverting the Pyramid: The *Sensus Fideilum* in a Synodal Church," *Theological Studies* 78/2 (2017): 57.
[417] International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church,* 70.
[418] Synod of Bishops, *Instrumentum Laboris for the First Session (October 2023)*, no 34.
[419] Synod of Bishops, no. 39.

The central conviction operative in the life of BECs and in the theology of synodality demonstrate how space is created for the Spirit. In listening to the Spirit, participants in the synodal practice are invited to listen deeply and to discern the Spirit in the everyday in dialogue with the Scripture and tradition. These synodal practices open up the space to learn from all the faithful and the Spirit speaking through them.

B. The Third Voice Emerges

PAR is a process of co-producing knowledge with people. Using an educational configuration, PAR engages the local knowledges of the people, capacitates the people as co-researchers, and is oriented towards an engagement with the realities that they seek to understand in the process. What arises from this process of co-production is what Brinton Lykes calls the "third voice," a voice which is "an interplay of multiple understandings where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts."[420] The third voice arises from different local knowledges, but more importantly, it arises from the encounter of the participants of PAR, varying in social locations, in dialogical relationship.

The PAR case featured in Chapter Four demonstrates the dynamics of getting to the third voice in PAR. Recall the PhotoVoice process that Lykes did with the Maya Ixil women in Guatemala. The process invited the participants to take photos that they think represent the theme that was determined by the community together. After taking photos, they gather together, pick out which photos represent the theme more than the others, and tell the narratives behind the photos. In the telling of narratives, other voices interpret the photos, highlighting what resonates

[420] Brinton Lykes and Gabriel Tavara, "Feminist Participatory Action Research: Cocunstructing Liberation Psychological Praxis Through Dialogic Relationality and Critical Reflexivity" in *Liberation Psychology,* Lillian Comas-Diaz and Edil Torres Rivera, eds. (American Psychological Association, 2020), 126.

with them upon seeing the photos. In Lykes' case, I highlighted the particular narrative of Ana Maria who took a photo of a ceremonial site. Gone through the participatory process being described above, Lykes notes that the first narrative of Ana Maria "represents less than 20% of the final photonarrative. The latter includes themes that synthesize and extend both Ana Maria's analysis and that of the small group."[421] What is brought up after the process is a larger narrative that was weaved in the PhotoVoice process. In Ana Maria's case, the historic memory of the campesinos murdered in that site by soldiers during *la violencia* that was previously suppressed in the earlier narratives is now given voice in the final narrative. More voices are added to the original narrative.

What happens in the process of articulating the third voice is the engagement with the resonances that come from the process of listening and seeing the different narratives that were told in the process. Through the narrative being weaved from the different resonances and interpretation, the individual person "speaks not only for herself but speaks for [and with] the whole community."[422] The narrative that was produced together in the PhotoVoice project was something that is "a polyvocal composite through which multiple voices are raised and subjectivities performed."[423] The original narrative that Ana Maria offered to the community created the opportunity for different people to weave their own narratives and interpretations, creating something new in the process.

The third voice, being a polyvocal composite, is a result of a co-construction of knowledge in the context of the dialogical relationships that were formed in the PAR process. Lykes argues that the third voice

[421] Lykes, "Silence(ing), voice(s) and gross violations of human rights: constituting and performing subjectivities through PhotoPAR," *Visual Studies* 25/3 (2010): 246.
[422] Lykes, "Silence(ing)," 250.
[423] Lykes, "Silence(ing)," 250.

> posits that what is produced through accompaniment processes within circulations of power that privilege some voices and marginalize others is neither exclusively the voice of the privileged committed to decolonizing their privilege nor of the marginalized who dare to break the silence, but is rather a dialogic co-construction.[424]

The creation of new knowledge arises from the collaboration born from dialogical relationships that cross the circulations of power and privilege. The third voice is seen not in one voice or the other, but in the meeting of multiple voices and perspectives.

The third voice is a crucial foundation for a decolonial and synodal religious education, and gives language to what I hope to arise in religious education. PAR demonstrates a different process of co-producing knowledge through a dialogical approach that creates these knowledges not just from an exchange of ideas and interpretations but in relationship and in being with each other.

C. The Emergent Is in the Resonant

These two foundations – synodality and PAR – give language to what I hope for in a decolonial and synodal religious education. I hope for a kind of learning wherein people listen more closely to one another and in doing so, something new emerges in the encounter. In using the methods of PAR in the context of a grassroots church community, my hope is for the voice of the Spirit to emerge in the voices of the people engaged with their everyday realities, which resonate the Spirit's voice. I see the emerging voice arising in what is resonant – and this is discerned closely in the interior movements of the community through the dynamics of the sensus fidei and the accompaniment process in PAR. The Spirit is learned in the meeting of multiple voices and

[424] Alison Crosby and M. Brinton Lykes, *Beyond Repair? Mayan Women's Protagonism in the Aftermath of Genocidal Harm* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 20.

perspectives engaged in intentional and sincere dialogue. In reconfiguring spaces for this encounter to happen, space is created for the Spirit to teach and guide the church today.

A decolonial and synodal religious education is one that intentionally creates space for people to learn in the Spirit. As the Spirit is already at work among the people, religious education facilitates a listening to this Spirit and engages the people into hearing the Spirit's voice resonating in each other and the larger reality they find themselves in. Informed by the methods of PAR, religious education aims to articulate a third voice in the process that begins to discern and express how the Spirit is guiding the church today. In the two sections that follow, I discuss how this learning in the Spirit can happen in religious education. Space is created for the Spirit through dialogue and in engaging local theologies.

II. Creating Space for Dialogue

Dialogue is central in a decolonial and synodal religious education. In the different cases being presented in this dissertation, all of the grassroots communities take on a dialogical modality in the way that they learn with each other – BECs discern with each other in a dialogical way while PAR reimagines the method of research as a dialogue that co-produces knowledge with communities. Dialogue creates space for different voices to enter in contexts of silencing and colonial ways of being, which I characterize as a decolonial shift in theology and education. Antonia Darder argues that dialogue is a powerful and transformative decolonial process where learners build communities that give space for them to "freely give voice to their thoughts, ideas, and perceptions about what they know and what they are attempting to understand."[425] In the context of the long serpentine decolonial movement towards a world otherwise, dialogue is an

[425] Antonia Darder, *Reinventing Paulo Freire: A Pedagogy of Love* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 92.

act of resistance against colonial silencing and a way for the pluriverse to usher into the imagination of the learning community.

In the discussion throughout this dissertation, the different frameworks not only center dialogue, but reimagine what dialogue is. For grassroots communities, dialogue is not merely an exchange of ideas, a conversation, or a discourse, but it is a being with, an engagement with each other in relationships. This notion of dialogue as relationship is something that is seen in grassroots communities and is picked up by synodality and PAR as the modality they use in how they learn with each other. I argue that the kind of learning that happens in dialogue is a learning through diffraction wherein dialogue is seen not merely as a discussion of different opposing perspectives, but a "being with" where people learn their relationships with each other, their entanglements to the Land, and create new ways of being together.

A. Reimagining Dialogue

Both critical pedagogy and synodality provide foundations that reimagine how dialogue is an encounter. For critical pedagogy, an education for critical consciousness is a dialogical education. As seen in the PAR example above (as PAR is a modality of critical pedagogy), the articulation of the third voice is brought about through dialogical relationality. For synodality, the modality of being church becomes more dialogical – dialogue is understood in various ways, but the living with each other becomes a key characteristic of synodal dialogue.

Critical pedagogy reimagines education as a dialogical practice that is central to its vision of an emancipatory education. Transformative dialogue is key in the co-production of knowledge, in creating space for silenced voices to enter the discussion, and in the emergence of a critical consciousness. In the case of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy as I discuss in Chapter

Three, dialogue is key for critical reflection and action. Freire describes dialogue as "the encounter between men [sic.], mediated by the world, in order to name the world."[426] In contrast with a common way of understanding dialogue as an exchange of ideas, Freire asserts that dialogue is an encounter. Darder describes what happens in Freire's dialogical education clearly:

> Such dialogue cultivates and nurtures students' curiosity and imagination toward a greater critical capacity to confront dialectically the content of their study and the task of constructing new knowledge. This process of problem-posing serves to enliven, motivate, and reinforce creativity and the 'emergence of critical consciousness' in the learning process, as students grapple critically to better understand the past, present, and future in making sense of the world.[427]

In Freire's critical pedagogy, transformative dialogue is a process of co-constructing knowledge together with the hope of an emergence of a critical consciousness.

Critical pedagogy seen concretely in the process of PAR demonstrates more clearly how dialogue is a learning through relationships. From the very start of its process until the end, PAR assumes a dialogical modality and is intentional in establishing dialogical relationships. As a process that is aware of the dynamics of identity, power, and agency, PAR acknowledges how participants of dialogue come from different social locations that could "constrain and facilitate diverse ways of engagement."[428] As Lykes argues, all knowing "emerges from a particular subject position and is, therefore partial or situated. People engage with each other from diverse stances, creating new meanings and knowledges through their interactions."[429] As I argue in Chapter Four, PAR attempts to build relationships in the context of the differing power dynamics through the process of critical self-reflexivity, which is a process of being aware of the different

[426] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York: Continuum, 2005), 88.
[427] Darder, 91.
[428] Brinton Lykes and Gabriela Tavara, "Feminist Participatory Action Research: Cocunstructing Liberation Psychological Praxis Through Dialogic Relationality and Critical Reflexivity" in *Liberation Psychology,* Lillian Comas-Diaz and Edil Torres Rivera, eds (American Psychological Association, 2020), 120.
[429] Lykes and Tavara, 122.

overlapping identities that people bring into the field and interrogating the power dynamics in an attempt to create a (social) space that is more just. This involves paying close attention to the privileges that create epistemological and methodological challenges in research.

Furthermore, PAR takes on a dialogical mode in the process of co-producing knowledge and practices. What happened in the PhotoVoice project was a tapping into the local knowledge of Maya women and working with them to co-construct in their own words, what *la violencia* did to their communities and how they are living in its aftermath. This is different from other forms of research that are more top-down and positivist in their approach. PAR reimagines research as a more iterative and co-constructive process that engages the participants grounded in robust relationships. As I argue in Chapter Four, meaning-making has a dialogical nature, as knowledge also has a contextual nature. The local knowledges brought forth in PAR are put into conversation together. And as people engage with each other in their diverse perspectives, they create "new meanings and knowledge(s) through their interactions,"[430] the third voice as I mentioned above.

Synodality has similar assumptions in its construal of dialogue. In one sense, what happens in communal discernment is a dialogue that engages the faith of people rooted in the everyday with the Sacred text and tradition. In this exchange, dialogue is seen as a bearing witness to revelation wherein the Spirit reveals Godself in many different places, including local knowledges and theologies. But throughout the synodal process, people are brought together as an ecclesial community by the Spirit who guides the church. Throughout the process, the community is in dialogue with one another – not just in the sense of conversing about how the Spirit is being revealed in the everyday, but the community bear witness to each other.

[430] Lykes and Tavara, 122.

Synodality is a way for people to recognize the inherent baptismal dignity of all and that all have something to learn from one another.

The theologian Raimon Panikkar enhances this understanding of dialogue as an encounter in his notion of a dialogical dialogue, which he contrasts with a dialectical dialogue in Chapter Four. In dialogical dialogue, dialogue is more about the encounter of subjects instead of the ideas that are being discussed.[431] This encounter, "consists in the *experience* of the other person's otherness, of her being *together with* – and not just *in front of* – the subject…. It is the concrete manifestation of the human *relational* identity, embodied in a particular experience."[432] Dialogue, understood in terms of Panikkar's theology emphasizes the characteristic of dialogue as an encounter, as a learning and being in relationship with all those involved.

The emphasis on encounter does not mean that dialogue will not involve discourse and conversation. As demonstrated above in the PAR example, dialogue still involves interrogating ideas and putting different knowledges in conversation with each other. However, in this emphasis of dialogue as an encounter, I argue for a dialogue that does not separate knowing and being from each other – both are involved in the material-discursive practice of dialogue in grassroots communities. Furthermore, I argue for a dialogue which is a learning of relationships – an encounter with different people with different contexts and perspectives, a recognition of their agency and how entangled they are with each other, and a living-into of that relationship.

[431] Raimon Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999), 29-30.
[432] Zaida Espinosa Zarate, "Epistemological Foundations of Intercultural Education: Contributions from Raimon Panikkar," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 42 (2023): 510.

B. Learning through Diffraction

When dialogue is encounter, the learning that happens is a learning of relationships – a learning of how all are entangled with one another and the larger reality, a learning of how to live together for justice and peace. Dialogical education is not only a learning *about* justice and peace, but it is the enactment of justice and peace in itself. I reimagine education as a material-discursive practice wherein the practice of learning with one another is already an engagement with the larger reality of the community. In the meeting of the community and in learning with one another in dialogue, they engage the larger world around them with new ways of being and knowing.

This model of learning can be illustrated through the phenomenon of diffraction, which I find to be a useful image in describing what happens in a dialogical education. As discussed in Chapter Three, diffraction is a phenomenon found in the natural world wherein "waves combine when they overlap" causing "apparent bending and spreading of waves that occurs when waves encounter an obstruction."[433] In contrast to reflection that seeks to replicate the same elsewhere, diffraction creates something new in the meeting of waves. In this interaction, the waves "interfere" with one another and could create either bigger waves when two crests meet or smaller waves when a crest of one wave meets a trough of another. It is important to note, according to Karen Barad, that in the interference that happens, "no impact or collision occurs, as in the case of two particles. On the contrary, the whole point is that the waves can coexist unhindered by each other's presence; they can overlap in a common spatial region."[434] In other words, the dynamics of diffraction both involves a recognition of entanglement but also of

[433] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 74.
[434] Barad, 417.

difference and newness. As Barad argues, "Diffraction is not merely about differences, and certainly not differences in any absolute sense, but about the entangled nature of differences that matter…. Diffraction is a material practice for making a difference, for topologically reconfiguring connections."[435] In contrast to reflection which is a representationalist way of education, diffraction is a performative act – as the community learns with each other, they engage each other and the reality that they are part of, they make a difference in the world.

In the same way, dialogical education is a learning through diffraction. In a dialogical configuration, the learners are all entangled with one another and the reality that they seek to understand. The speaking of different voices and the listening of varied perspectives are like waves that pass through the learning community, creating constructive or destructive diffractions. The recognition of entanglement is crucial in dialogical education, and the learning of entanglement and relationships, of place and space, is a crucial first step in this kind of learning.

Furthermore, learning through diffraction is a shift away from a representationalist kind of education that just seeks to reflect reality in one's understanding, replicating whatever is observed onto paper. Instead of a representationalist way of knowing, a diffractive methodology reimagines learning as a more performative act. When grassroots communities learn with each other, they are not merely replicating what they see and learning about them in their gatherings. In communal discernment, in conversations in the Spirit, in PAR, the community together co-constructs knowledge and different ways of knowing and being.

[435] Barad, 381.

C. Being with One Another

In creating space for dialogue, a decolonial and synodal religious education invites people to relearn the relationships that they have with each other in a dialogical way. This religious education creates space wherein this encounter can happen and where local knowledges and ways of being interact with one another in the hopes of the third voice emerging in the process. Dialogical education is a form of emancipatory and diffractive learning. In the process of dialogical learning, members of the community acknowledge their entanglements and recognize what each has to teach another. And together, they engage the reality that they bring forth in the educational space. Learners are part of the reality that they seek to understand, and the act of learning is a participation in the unfolding of the universe – what they do with each other *matters*. In reimagining religious education this way, I see dialogical education as a practice that contributes to the continuous unfolding of the universe.

III. Creating Space for Local Theologies

The previous chapters describe current spaces that silence different voices – a rigid divide between a teaching and a learning church, a church rife with clericalism and elitism, a banking model of education, and a research tradition that objectifies grassroots communities. The spaces we live, breathe, pray, and learn are stifled by colonial ways of being that have been internalized and replicated in ecclesial and educational spaces.

In resistance to the silencing, a decolonial and synodal religious education is a way for people to do theology with one another that engages their local ways of knowing and being in dialogue. This religious education interrogates current spaces that silence the voices of the faithful while at the same time creates spaces for local theologies to be heard. In doing so,

religious education becomes a pedagogy of resistance and a part of the larger decolonial project that opens up the space to the pluriverse of different ways of knowing and being.

PAR is a decolonial practice of space-making that centers marginalized and silenced voices in the process of knowledge production. Instead of their voices being forever excluded from discourse, PAR engages the local knowledges of grassroots communities and involves them as co-researchers who exercise agency in the process of research. In combining PAR and synodality in religious education, there arises a way for church members to listen more closely to one another, engaging the local theologies of the community present. In a synodal PAR, a shift is made from a colonial church that rigidly divides between a teaching and a learning church to a church that learns with one another and recognizes the theological/teaching authority of all the faithful, even and perhaps especially those marginalized.

A. Decolonial Pedagogies Rising: Pedagogies of Resistance

Basic ecclesial communities in the Philippines learn with one another in what I describe as a pedagogy of resistance. Similar to how Nancy Pineda-Madrid described the practices of the women in Juarez as practices of resistance, BECs claim space where they can grapple with their reality, subvert it, and make sense of it in light of their faith.[436] In the context of the dictatorship in the 1960s and 70s, BECs gathered together to ask, "What is the Spirit of God telling us about how we should act in regard to the problem at hand?"[437] In their regular meetings where they practiced theological reflection, bible reading sessions, and communal worship, BEC discerned together in the symbols and narratives of their faith, employing a hermeneutic that puts the

[436] Cf. Nancy Pineda-Madrid, *Suffering and Salvation in Ciudad Juarez* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 98.
[437] Francisco Claver, *The Making of a Local Church,* 83-84.

everyday lives of the people in dialogue with Scripture and tradition.[438] In contrast to a pedagogy of empire that silences, ignores, and dominates its subjects, a pedagogy of resistance comes from the people and arises from the people's knowledge. In centering the people, this pedagogy broadens the social imaginary as communities subvert and reinterpret symbols and narratives of their faith to respond to the reality that they are facing. In this space, those who suffer are present to their experiences and in engaging with their experiences together, they could start the work of reimagining a world that is otherwise.

The pedagogy of resistance is part of a larger decolonial movement that seeks to move away from colonial ways of being towards a world that is otherwise.[439] At the vestiges of empire and its religion, the work of decoloniality is resistance against colonial structures and cultures that have been deeply embedded in the minds and hearts of people until today. As argued in Chapter One, Christianity has been co-opted by imperial and colonial structures, removing it from its origins in the resistance of Jesus against empire. A religious education that uses a pedagogy of resistance harkens back to the resistance of Jesus in the gospels. In their resistance, decoloniality is the long work of reimagining the otherwise, creating space for what Arturo Escobar calls the pluriverse, which is "the idea of multiple worlds," coming from the Zapatista concept of "a world in which many worlds might fit."[440] In this sense, decoloniality is not merely a condition to be achieved in the future, nor does it imply "the absence of coloniality," but it refers more to a "movement toward possibilities of other modes of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, and living."[441] Decoloniality, then, is praxis – the work of undoing hierarchies and rigid

[438] Claver, 83.
[439] Cf. Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, and Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 17
[440] Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 26.
[441] Mignolo and Walsh, 81.

divisions that stifle the way people learn with one another and the work of creating structures where the subaltern can speak.[442] Visions of a world that is otherwise rises from this reimagining: the master's house dismantled, a tent being enlarged, new homes being constructed where everyone can live.

At the heart of this decolonial movement is the work of pedagogy which problematizes the very structures that colonize and subjugate the minds and hearts of the people and capacitate silenced voices to speak. Proponents of critical pedagogy reimagine the work of education, transforming it from a tool that dominates and silences to an education that liberates and decolonizes social structures and the hearts of the people. Critical pedagogies, like that of Paulo Freire, critiques colonizing pedagogical practices where knowledge is seen "as a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing,"[443] where students are only seen as receivers of knowledge and information. This leads to educational institutions "systematically [functioning] to silence the cultural traditions and knowledge of those deemed 'other.'"[444] Building on Freire, Antonia Darder argues that

> this brutal marginalization of cultural knowledge by the colonizing mainstream is understood as the cultural invasion tied to epistemological forces within schools, still plagued by colonizing formations of domination. In this process, this hidden curriculum of cultural invasion, which has made such a mockery of indigenous knowledge, must be exposed at its most vulnerable point – its pseudo-universal rationality of superiority.[445]

Critical pedagogy exposes the colonial structures of oppression in practices of education such as the education that happens in schools and grassroots church communities. In turn, critical pedagogy then sees the task of resurgence and insurgence of the knowledge and ways of being

[442] Mignolo and Walsh, 17.
[443] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 72.
[444] Darder, 89.
[445] Darder, 89.

that have been systematically silenced, the decolonial task is to "center the histories and cultural ways of knowing of oppressed populations, providing a place at the center of the discourse, rather than forever remaining outside of knowledge construction."[446] In other words, decolonial pedagogy "imply the possibility of re-knowing the multiple knowledges, thoughts, experiences, existences, cosmovisions, dissidences, and emotions that cross the subjects and populations that produce knowledges from positionalities that locate them as subalternized, exploited, oppressed, etc."[447]

In Chapter Three, Catherine Walsh argues that pedagogy is an indispensable tool for decolonial transformation.[448] Her conviction is that to reimagine a world otherwise, decolonial pedagogies are urgently needed to usher in the re-existence and the re-knowing of multiple worlds that have been silenced by colonial structures of power.[449] Decolonial pedagogy is one that interrogates the hegemonic and colonial and creates spaces for silenced voices to be heard in the process of knowledge production. In creating space for silenced voices, the task of decolonial pedagogy is not to speak *for* the silenced, but to find out and illustrate *why the other cannot speak*. In other words, decolonial educators should not attempt to represent the other, but to "represent how the other is represented, and how these ideologically conditioned representations silence the very object of representation."[450] Furthermore, a decolonial pedagogy is a "problem-posing education" that does not set a pre-determined agenda, but instead "roots itself in the

[446] Darder, 89.
[447] Cariño et al., "Pensar, sentir, y hacer pedagogias feministas descoloniales: Dialogos y puntadas," in *Pedagogias decoloniales: Practicas insurgents de resistir, (re)existir y (re)vivir,* vol. 2, ed. Catherine Walsh (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2017), 525 in Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality,* 95.
[448] Mignolo and Walsh, 92.
[449] Mignolo and Walsh, 96. In Walsh's chapter, she was bringing up different decolonial pedagogies that have been formed in the struggle to imagine a world otherwise.
[450] Fredrik Svensson, *Paulo Freire, Gayatri Spivak, and the (Im)possibility of Education: The Methodological Leap in Pedagogy of the Oppressed and "Righting Wrongs* (Huddinge, Sweden: Södetörn University, 2012), 12.

dynamic present and becomes revolutionary"[451] in the way it invites the learners to co-create the agenda of their own learning and puts what they want to learn and what they deem important to discuss at the center of the discourse. The [social] space being made is a community of learners in which all can learn with one another with each one recognizing and hearing all voices that should have a say in the discussion of their realities. In hearing one another and putting local knowledges at the center of knowledge production, decolonial pedagogy ushers in the pluriverse.

B. Learning in the Theological Pluriverse

Synodality is an attempt to learn from all the faithful, to engage with the local knowledge of the people rooted in the everyday. In its commitment to listening to the faithful, synodality is an attempt to create space for the theological pluriverse: different ways of meaning-making in terms of the integration of faith and the everyday, different ways of being church, different ways of educating in faith, a listening to the Spirit in different places. Like how Escobar defines the pluriverse as a world where many worlds fit, the theological pluriverse is an engagement with different kinds of local theologies that discern the Spirit being revealed in many ways in everyday contexts. Pedagogies of resistance create space and listen to the many voices in the theological pluriverse, given the parameters and the hermeneutical framework discussed in Chapter Two about discerning what is and what is not of the Spirit. In synodal practices like communal discernment and conversations in the Spirit, religious education is reconfigured from a rigidly divided teaching and learning church to a church where all learn with one another. At the heart of this shift is a renewed understanding of authority and a recognition of the revelatory nature of the everyday.

[451] Darder, 91, cf. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 72.

In the BEC's practice of communal discernment, what is brought forth are the everyday experiences of its members. BECs are characterized as communities who "consciously strive to integrate their faith and their daily life."[452] What is distinct with these communities is their way of proceeding wherein members make meaning of their realities in the framework of their faith and discerning how they are to respond to their realities accordingly. In gathering together for communal discernment, the community discerns the Spirit present in their lived realities and follow this Spirit who guides them into mission in their context. This demonstrates a shift in how educating in faith is done and a reconfiguration of theological authority – from a top-down approach to one that is more horizontal, from a notion of learning that is more cerebral and theoretical to one that integrates theory and practice together into a learning that stems from and engages reality.

The emphasis on the everyday is central in the practice of synodality and it represents a central part of the shift from a colonial church to a church where everyone learns with one another in the Spirit. Synodality is a listening to the Spirit in the experiences of the people of God engaged in the everyday. Giving space to these stories is not only giving space to just another perspective, but as the argument in Chapter Two emphasizes, the everyday represents a perspective that has been historically silenced by a colonial church. As Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz argues, "The epistemological function of the everyday indicates that the struggles of the poor and the oppressed taking place in the underside of history constitutes the place, the moment – the horizon – of grassroots people's knowledge of reality."[453] The attention given by synodality to the everyday is an opening of the space to ways of knowing and ways of being that have

[452] Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Pasay City: St. Paul Publication, 1992), no. 139.
[453] Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, "Lo Cotidiano: A Key Element of Mujerista Theology," *Journal of Hispanic/Latino Theology* 10/1 (August 2002): 13.

previously been silenced by the powerful and privileged, or even worse, demonized and deemed as invalid in the process of theological knowledge production.

In addition to the opening up to perspectives that have long been silenced, paying attention to the everyday is a way to expand the theological horizon and a broadening of an understanding of revelation. "It is in daily life where revelation occurs," Maria Pilar Aquino argues, and the revelatory nature of the everyday begs a crucial consideration in the practice of synodality, i.e. that the everyday asserts revelatory authority. If the everyday is one of the places where the Spirit is revealed, synodality must make an intentional effort at listening and discerning the Spirit found in the everyday.

The argument in Chapter Two about the authority of the everyday is foundational in understanding a synodality that creates space for silenced voices. Everyday life provides the conditions of the possibility that "authorize" an interpretation of Scripture and tradition in the practice of communal discernment.[454] When the community asks, "What does our faith say to the problem, what does it advise us to do about it?"[455] Scripture and tradition are being read in the context of the everyday. What happens in communal discernment is an exercise of authority that is dialogical and relational – in putting these different sources in dialogue with each other, community members seek out different ways the Spirit is being revealed in different places. Without threat of force or imposition of just one interpretation of Scripture or tradition, the people dialogue with sources of faith as they make meaning in the context of the everyday that is revelatory of the Spirit guiding the church today.[456] In creating spaces for silenced voices in

[454] Ferdinand Dagmang, *Basic Ecclesial Communities: An Evaluation of the Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) in Ten Parishes in the Philippines* (Munich: Missio Munich, 2016), 43, 56.
[455] Claver, 83-84.
[456] For dialogical and relational authority, see Sandra Schneiders, *Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, second edition (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 55.

communal discernment, new interpretations can emerge, new ways of being church can be practiced, and the Spirit can be heard more clearly from different places, which were not even considered before.

Synodality, then, also has the opportunity to become decolonial in its praxis. Synodality creates space for people to do theology together and for the Spirit to be discerned in different places. The community, instead of being passive, subalternized recipients of the church's evangelization, become active agents of the church's life and mission. Synodality capacitates voices and creates spaces for the discernment of the Spirit. In the recognition of the people's baptismal dignity, a new understanding of theological authority emerges in which the people themselves are witness to the Spirit guiding the church in their everyday lives, guiding all to learn with one another in the theological pluriverse.

C. PAR as Decolonial and Synodal Pedagogy

PAR, then, is a decolonial and synodal pedagogy in the way that it creates spaces to engage local knowledges, once silenced, and to discern the Spirit being revealed in the everyday. As a way to learn with one another, PAR reconfigures education as a way to engage local knowledges and theologies. PAR's decolonial approach de-centers the claim to universality that dominant educational models/research traditions/theologies have, and in turn, creates a "prophetic space" for the pluriverse to emerge, "where we help to bring about alternative practices for more humane living."[457]

[457] Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, "Participatory Action Research: Practical Theology for Social Justice," *Religious Education* 101/3 (2006): 326.

As a way of space-making, a decolonial and synodal religious education creates a space for co-constructing knowledge together. Engaging local theologies in the context of dialogue, this religious education creates space for the Spirit.

IV. Learning with One Another in the Spirit

This dissertation is an exercise of learning from grassroots church communities and reimagining religious education as a decolonial and synodal practice that creates spaces for the Spirit to be heard in the dialogue of a community engaged in doing local theology with one another. Using the method of PAR and grounded on the foundations of synodality and critical pedagogy, this dissertation proposes a religious education that creates the possibility for all to learn with one another in the Spirit. Religious education, as an education in the Spirit invites a deep listening and an even more courageous following of how the Spirit is leading the church today.

Furthermore, this dissertation is also a material-discursive practice. My hope in writing this dissertation is not just for me to just replicate concepts and cases on paper, but for me to participate in the long serpentine movement towards a world that is otherwise, for a church that is otherwise, for an education that is otherwise – all freed from colonial ways of being that have been internalized and replicated throughout time. In reimagining religious education, my hope and invitation is for us all to learn with one another and with the Spirit, the great teacher who guides the church into new ways of knowing and being.

CHAPTER SIX

EPILOGUE:

THE WORK THAT LIES AHEAD

In reimagining a decolonial and synodal religious education through PAR, I realize that this dissertation is only part of a larger work to decolonize and promote synodality in church communities today. The work ahead is to collaborate in creating spaces where people can learn with one another and in doing so, listen to the Spirit guiding the church today. In this short epilogue, I offer a few thoughts as I conclude the dissertation and shift towards the work that lies ahead.

As I argue in this dissertation, grassroots church communities have already been bearing witness to a church that is both synodal and decolonial. The BECs in the Philippines have come a long way since their growth in the 1960s and 70s in Mindanao and have spread throughout the country since then. The 2022 Synodal Report identifies these communities as part of a list of "structures that allow for active participation in the life of the church."[458] The BECs continue to organize today and learn with one another as they engage different contexts in the Philippines that provide both challenges and opportunities.

One example, as seen in Chapter Three, is the Pulangiyen community in Bukidnon learn with each other and the Land in the *gaup* where "education starts, developed, and is sustained."[459] Using a synodal process where Indigenous youth listened to each other's

[458] Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, *Salubong (Welcoming Encounter): The Philippine Catholic Church Synodal Report* (15 August 2022), https://synodphilippines.com/salubong-the-philippine-catholic-church-synodal-report/, no. 8.
[459] Apu Palamguwan Cultural Education Center, *Culture-Based Education in a Community School*, (Pasig: Department of Education, 2012), 7.

experiences in the community and reflecting on *Laudato Si'* in their context, they discerned ways moving forward like the restoration of the forest and a closer collaboration with tribal councils. Their witness is important as grassroots communities today face greater challenges brought about by the effects of climate change. Their witness shows a learning with each other, the Land, and the Spirit who guides them as they continue to engage current challenges that are happening to the Land. A growing number of BECs today consider the care for the environment as a more urgent need, and I only expect it to grow more in the coming years.

Aside from climate change, BECs also face issues of social justice in their communities. Since the election of Rodrigo Duterte in 2016 with his violent plan of eradicating the country of its alleged drug problem, the Philippines has seen a worsening situation of the abuses of human rights and poverty that has targeted urban poor neighborhoods. With the rise of extrajudicial killings, local churches responded by organizing communities as a way of creating space for each other to discern and act together against the killings going on in their neighborhoods. For example, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Kalookan that spans three cities in Northern Metro Manila is an area that has been most hit by extrajudicial killings. In response, "mission stations" were formed, with the mandate below:

> In the event of alarming extrajudicial killings, lack of communal response to the different present social issues, the poor's perception of being forgotten by the Church, and lack of sense of community, the Mission Stations were established to principally be the Church's concrete presence in the poorest of the poor community of the Diocese.[460]

One of the main goals of the mission stations is to form communities in urban poor neighborhoods and to assist families whose members were killed in the extrajudicial killings. The space created in these mission stations provides a venue for communal discernment,

[460] "Jesuit Mission Station Facebook Page," (2018), https://www.facebook.com/jesuitmissionstation.

solidarity, programs, and services to respond to the killings and to the suffering that the killings left in its wake. In another community hit by the killings, they established Project SOW (Solidarity with Orphans and Widows) where the local church assists families affected by the killings "by providing psychosocial interventions and treatments that will respond to their economic needs, their quest for justice, and their desire to be healed from the trauma brought about by the tragic death of their loved ones."[461] They do so in synodal ways that involve the orphans and the widows as they discern how they are to seek justice and heal after the violence that took place.

The work ahead is to engage in dialogue with local communities to see prospects of working together and to offer ways moving forward in dialogical relationship – to co-construct decolonial and synodal pathways and to do theology together in an effort to respond to the challenges that community members face. A decolonial and synodal religious education through PAR creates space for local ways of knowing and being.

PAR is an opportunity for people to learn with one another. In creating space for the participation of the people, PAR taps into local knowledges and creates the possibility for engaging with different ways of knowing and being and theologizing that have been suppressed by dominant ways of research and social structures that silence and ignore the people as co-producers of knowledge and meaning. In the context of the killings, PAR could be a tool to achieve a lasting justice after the violence. PAR could help recover the historical memories of the community that have been suppressed and ignored and could be used in the path towards healing and justice. In the context of climate change, PAR could help tap into the cosmovisions that ground the people with their Land. PAR could be a tool towards ecological justice that

[461] "SOW Project – Saint Vincent School of Theology," *Saint Vincent School of Theology,* https://www.svst.edu.ph/sow-project#general-objective-32.

demonstrates a learning with the Land – a learning of entanglements and a learning to be with one another. And in these contexts, the use of PAR in a decolonial and synodal religious education is a way to do theology together – for the voice of the Spirit to be heard in the dialogue of the people in the Land, whose voices reveal the Spirit.

The work that lies ahead is a work with and in the Spirit who teaches and guides the church today. Communities are already listening and the hope is that we all collaborate to do the same – to create space to learn in the Spirit and to heed the words in Scripture: "Do not stifle the Spirit!"[462]

[462] 1 Thessalonians 5:19

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